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Isabel St Clair.
by
Julia Addison.



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ISABEL ST. CLAIR,

A ROMANCE OF THE 17th CENTURY.

BY

JULIA ADDISON,

Author of "Sister Kate," "Effie Vernon," &c.



London :

REMINGTON & Co., 5, ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

1876.

251 . e . 353.

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ISABEL ST. CLAIR.

CHAPTER I.

ST. CLAIR HALL.

"Oh, mamma, do let us take a long walk this fine evening?" said Isabel St. Clair, a girl of about twelve years old, running up to her mother, who was standing on the terrace of an old mansion in the North of England. Isabel was followed by her little brother Arthur, who joined in the request.

Mrs. St. Clair assented, and quitting the terrace, with its antique stone vases, and quaint sun dial, that had told the time to many a past generation of St. Clairs, the trio passed through

the shrubberies, crossed the moat by what had formerly been the drawbridge, and so on towards a steep hill, which was the children's favourite walk.

Isabel and Arthur St. Clair, young as they were, had known sorrow and misfortune. They lived in wild and troublous times—their father, a devoted adherent of the House of Stuart, had fought gallantly for the first Charles, and though broken in health by wounds and hardships, was one of the few Englishmen who joined the standard of that ill-fated monarch's son, when resolved to make one last desperate attempt to recover his kingdom. He marched southwards with his Scottish army, to be ultimately defeated at the second battle of Worcester. In this engagement, or rather massacre, for the gallant Royalists were hemmed in and literally slaughtered in the streets—in this last decisive encounter, which ended the civil war, Major St. Clair lost his life.

A year later, Cromwell and his Commonwealth being undisputed rulers of the country,

the St. Clair estates, amongst hundreds of others, were confiscated, falling into the hands of Lambert Moneton, a grim old Puritan; the widow with her infant children, finding refuge with a merchant of the City of London, named Goldsac, who, with his maiden sister, lived in the then by no means unfashionable locality of Fleet-street.

About a twelvemonth before the time when our story opens, King Charles II., being restored to his throne, had given back to the young Arthur his lawful inheritance, under the guardianship of his mother, and the little family once more took possession of their beautiful home, which was all the dearer from its having been so long lost to them.

To return to our story. The children walked merrily along, rejoicing in the bright spring weather that had succeeded a long and severe winter. Trees and shrubs were bursting into life and verdure, and all nature looked fresh and blooming. Having by a somewhat steep but winding ascent reached the summit of Rayrigg Fell, as the hill was called, a fine prospect met

the eye, moorland and valley and rocky crag; with here and there a gleaming lake, and bright mountain stream, leaping and sparkling in its course, forming many a miniature waterfall; while a break in the chain of hills allowed the distant sea coast to be seen. This was only in clear weather; on the present occasion, not only was the dim blue ocean line distinctly visible, but also the ruins of an old castle, which it was a great delight to the children to look at, and speculate upon; standing on the rocky shore, its outline rising in weird and shadowy grandeur above all the neighbouring objects.

“How much nicer this is than London,” presently said Arthur. “How glad I am we live here now. Are not you, Isabel?”

“Yes, dear,” answered his sister, “but do not let us talk just now. Our mother looks pale, and I am afraid her head aches.”

Both children approached their mother affectionately.

“I am quite well, my dears,” she said,

answering their anxious looks, "but I felt sad just now, for I was thinking of the last time your dear father and I climbed up this hill together, only a week before his death. It is more than nine years ago. You, Isabel, were a little girl of three and a half; Arthur a baby, scarcely two months old."

"Isabel was born in 1648," said Arthur, "the year before the poor king was killed."

"Yes, dear child, she came to console us in a time of trouble and confusion."

"Arthur was not born till '51," remarked Isabel.

"Just two months before the second battle of Worcester," said Arthur.

"I can remember my father," said Isabel, thoughtfully, "just a little."

"And I seem to know exactly how he looked," said Arthur, "when I see his picture. How lucky we were to find it up in the lumber-room, where old Master Moncton had stowed it away; and that he had not run a sword through it, as he had through some of the others in the gallery."

"Yes, indeed, it is a treasure," said Mrs. St. Clair, "so wonderfully lifelike and true."

"It was painted by Sir Anthony Vandyke, the same artist who painted King Charles I.," added Arthur, proud to show his information.

"Your father had, I think," resumed Mrs. St. Clair, "a presentiment that he should never see us again, when he went away that last time. He kissed us all so tenderly, called us his three treasures, his wife, his daughter, and his baby-boy, and told Isabel to be a good brave girl, and a comfort to her mother."

"I will try my best to obey his words," said Isabel; earnestly.

"And I, too, will be a good brave boy," said Arthur, with childish eagerness not to be left out.

"We have now no near relative left to care for us," continued Mrs. St. Clair. "Your uncle, whom you have often heard me speak of, your father's younger brother, must be dead, or we should have heard of him, for a kinder heart, or more affectionate disposition, never existed."

"How long is it since my uncle was heard of, mamma?" asked Arthur.

"Nearly twelve years. Your sister was a babe of a year old when he bade us farewell. He was about to join Prince Rupert; he had, of course, when the fleet was devoted to the service of the Parliament, been forced to abandon his profession of sailor, but was glad to resume it. He called Isabel his bonnie little lassie, and used to dance her in his arms so high that I sometimes feared he would let her drop. He said he would bring home a fortune in silver and gold from foreign lands for his little maiden, so that if a baby brother were born, to be heir to the estates, which he did not doubt, as the St. Clair lands had descended in a direct male line from father to son for more than three centuries, she should have a noble portion of her own."

"I will be as kind to my sister as our uncle would have been had he lived," said Arthur, raising his soft blue eyes to the faces of his companions, "and to my dear mother too. You shall both always live with me—indeed, what should I do without you."

“Dear boy,” said his mother, while Isabel caressed him fondly. “But you are very young yet.”

“How old was my uncle when he went away, mamma?” asked Arthur.

“Just twenty-one.”

“Twenty-one and twelve are thirty-three,” said Arthur. “Uncle must be quite an old man now.”

“Men are not old at thirty-three, nor women either,” said his older and more enlightened sister.

“It is sad to be left all alone and unprotected in the world,” said their mother, sorrowfully.

“Yes; wicked men might come and take our house or our lives,” said Arthur, who was of a timid and fearful disposition.

“But we must be resigned, my dear child, and trust in God,” said Mrs. St. Clair; “so do not look sad. Though only protected by servants, we performed safely all that long and somewhat perilous journey from London, but a year since. Your dear father would be glad, indeed, to know that we were restored to the home of our ancestors—our rights—rendered yet more secure by a

deed of gift to Arthur, under the king's own hand and seal, with many of our old valued servants and retainers gathered round us again. You, my two dear children," added the mother, as she embraced them fondly, "are my greatest earthly treasures, if I can but see you good and happy."

The distant hills were tinged by the last rays of the setting sun, as Mrs. St. Clair and her children descended the Rayrigg Fell, and walked slowly homewards. During the walk the mother said—

"You have never either of you had a near view of the sea, I think?"

"No," said Arthur, "but I should like to visit it very much, for then I could sail my little boat, and pick up shells, and—"

"And I," said his sister, interrupting him, "could climb up those rocks, and catch the sea birds, and bring them home to tame, and, above all, explore that lovely old castle."

"Oh, how delightful it would be!" cried both the children at once.

Mrs. St. Clair smiled, and said that they should go soon for a few days to the sea, as they so much wished it.

“I wonder,” pursued Isabel, “whether all the extraordinary things are true that I have been told about that castle; that strange sounds are heard, and wonderful sights seen about its walls by night, that it is really haunted?” She paused, then added, “I know, mamma, you have always taught us not to believe in ghosts or spectres. But I should like to see the castle, to explore it for myself, and perhaps have some romantic adventure. What say you, Arthur?”

“I have no such wish,” replied her more timid brother. “As you say, it may not be true, but still I had much rather keep out of the way. Grainger and Mrs. Smith say it is a dreadful old place this castle, one way and another; they have heard of it all their lives.”

The trio walked on in silence for some time, when Mrs. St. Clair, seeing that the children were grave, and Arthur pale, and wishing to divert them from sad or gloomy thoughts, said kindly—

"My dears, you must not forget the fête that is to be given next week in honour of Isabel's thirteenth birthday, and of our restoration to our beloved home."

"Oh no, mother," answered Isabel, and both children brightening up, talked of nothing but the approaching festivities during the remainder of their walk.

On reaching home, they at once ran off to give further directions concerning a tent that was being erected in the grounds. Isabel had set her heart on having a tent, and had persuaded her indulgent mother that the arrangements of the day would be incomplete without one. She had read of some grand entertainment, in which a tent had held a prominent place, and the idea had taken possession of her imagination.

The few days that intervened before this fête were chiefly spent in making preparations for it. Workmen from the neighbouring town of Stourbridge were constantly employed, and the culinary department was in a state of great activity.

CHAPTER II.

THE FÊTE.

THE much wished for, and long talked of day at length arrived. The children were dressed and ready long before the hour when the guests were expected to assemble.

Their costume was as simple as the fashion of the day permitted. Isabel wore a gown of brocaded white silk, with long pointed bodice, her dark glossy hair being suffered to fall in long natural curls to the waist, unconfined save by a single knot of ruby-coloured ribbon, while a lovely damask rose, reared with great pains and skill by the Scotch gardener, was fastened in the bosom of her dress, as its sole ornament. She had on the high-heeled shoes with jewelled buckles, of the period.

Arthur wore a suit of azure blue velvet, with point lace collar and ruffles, which became his Saxon complexion and fair hair; while a gold-laced hat, and a small sword and sword belt, which, young as he was, he was on this occasion allowed to wear, as the representative of an ancient house, completed his costume.

Mrs. St. Clair had always, since her husband's melancholy death, worn mourning. On this important day, however, she so far departed from her ordinary costume as to wear a richly brocaded robe of black satin, while her head-dress was composed of ostrich feathers, intermixed with strings of pearls, drawn together by a large diamond aigrette.

Her children were delighted when they saw the graceful figure and sweet refined face, shown to advantage by this attire, and declared that no one could possibly look more beautiful than their mother.

The neighbourhood was not very populous, many of the guests had far to come, but all who could attend did so. It was a numerous assem-

blage ; there were homely country squires, with their rosy cheeked wives and daughters ; and some aristocratic looking children, bearing, as did their parents, the unmistakeable stamp of patrician birth and breeding.

Isabel and Arthur received their young guests with frank and gentle courtesy, not the less pleasing for a slight degree of shyness consequent on their retired life ; but their mother had early taught them that unselfish regard for the feelings and comfort of others, which is the basis of all true politeness.

After a splendid banquet, served at noon in the old dining hall, where massive gold and silver salvers glistened, and where solid English fare, as well as a profusion of more recently introduced foreign delicacies, were offered to the guests ; the young people amused themselves with games, until summoned by lively music to the Oriel room, the largest in the house, the polished oak floor of which afforded excellent scope for the agility of the dancers. They performed minuets, corantes, and country dances, to their hearts' con-

tent, Isabel "opening the ball"—a term used with more correctness then than now—by dancing a minuet and gavotte with Master Hugh Beverley, son of Sir Lionel Beverley, of Penwick Manor, one of the most distinguished guests present, a young gentleman some two years her senior; both gaining deserved admiration for the graceful ease they displayed, whether in the stateliness of the former, or the sprightliness of the latter movement.

When the dancers at length grew weary, and the little band who played for them paused for rest and refreshment, every one strolled out into the grounds. It was one of those delightful May evenings so often spoken of by poets, so rarely met with in England at this early season. The air on the terrace and lawn was sweet and refreshing, after the heated atmosphere of the ballroom, yet without danger of chill; and there was as yet no dew upon the smooth, beautifully kept lawn. A glorious full moon was just rising, and from the trees near the tent, towards which Isabel and Arthur led the way, hung long strings

of many-coloured lamps, glistening among the leaves like soft gems of light, whilst, at intervals, pine torches illuminated the scene with dazzling brilliancy. It was a pleasing surprise for the guests, and then the tent itself was decorated with festoons and garlands of flowers and ever-greens, interspersed with rare exotics, so that altogether the scene had an enchanting fairylike effect. Supper was laid in the tent, and at ten o'clock, a late hour in those days, all the party sat down to partake of a substantial repast.

The evening wore on, toasts were given, songs sung, and speeches made. The servants and tenants were gathered round the entrance of the tent, listening to the speeches, and joining in the cheers when Isabel's health was drunk, with "three times three and one cheer more." The feast was drawing to a close, yet the merriment was still at its height, when a strange discordant murmur, at first distant, then drawing nearer and nearer, broke in upon the sounds of gaiety and laughter. Presently fearful cries of "Fire, fire!" became audible. "Fire!" a cry terrible at any

time, doubly fearful when it is heard at the dead of night, whether it bursts upon us in silence and solitude, or surprises us in the midst of mirth, music, and revelry.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRE.

GREAT was the consternation of the whole party at these cries. All started to their feet in an instant, and ran out of the tent. Some of the gentlemen and the servants hurried through the shrubberies, and one or two returning, told the terrified children that the intelligence was but too true. St. Clair Hall was on fire! They could soon see this for themselves; a lurid glare in the sky was visible above the high thick trees, and on reaching the lawn they saw flames issuing from the roof and most of the upper windows of the house. The scene that ensued was one of the greatest confusion, the servants and tenants hurrying backwards and forwards, endeavouring to save some of the most valuable books, pic-

tures, and furniture, from risk of destruction by the devouring flames, the children crying and screaming, the horses in the carriages, which were waiting to convey the guests to their respective homes, frightened by the fire, kicking, rearing, and plunging.

“Let us send to the village church for the water buckets and long ladders kept there!” said Mrs St. Clair; and Hugh Beverley, who was with that lady and her children, hastened off to despatch his own and other mounted servants. These were soon joined by some of the villagers, whom the noise and sight of the flames had brought out of their beds and cottages, and who lent willing aid. But the woodwork of the house was old, and the fire was raging furiously before any well-organized attempt could be made to get it under. Buckets were filled from the large tank or reservoir of water in the yard at the back of the house; these had to be passed on from hand to hand, by a line of people, up to those stationed on ladders—a slow and imperfect method, although the best, indeed the only one

known, in those days. Every man and boy helped with a will, but owing to the difficulty of getting the amateur fire brigade into working order, and to the limited supply of water, it was some time before much could be done to quell the fierce flames. There was fortunately not a breath of wind stirring, while the pale silvery rays of the moon contrasted strangely with the red glare of the fire.

So great was the sympathy and respect felt for the poor lady and her children, that none of the guests, except a few elderly and nervous people, thought of leaving whilst the danger lasted ; all who were capable worked, the women and little ones standing in groups on the lawn, as near to the scene of action as was consistent with safety, watching the proceedings with eager interest.

At length the persevering efforts of the zealous little band begun to tell, the violence of the fire gradually abated ; a murmur of rejoicing went round, in which workers and watchers joined, though the former showed symptoms of fatigue.

Some burns and other injuries had been received, while many a rich velvet coat was soiled and soaked with water, many a point lace ruffle singed and torn, and more than one gold-laced hat trodden under foot in the gallant service.

Mrs. St. Clair now caused some barrels of ale to be brought out on to the lawn, which she, with other ladies, quickly dispensed to all who were thirsty and heated with labour, as one detachment after another snatched a brief breathing time. All who had received hurts were carefully tended by the kind lady, aided by her old house-keeper.

"Mother, I am sure Master Beverley's arm is burnt," said Isabel, as he hastily quaffed a horn of ale she handed him, "see, his sleeve is all scorched and blackened!"

"Nay, I must not wait at present," he answered, "there is so much still to do. Indeed, I scarcely feel the hurt," and with a hasty bow and grateful look he ran off.

Thanks to the zealous assistants, a great number of valuable articles had been brought

out of the reach of danger, as there was no knowing how far the fire might spread. Now that the worst seemed over, Mrs. St. Clair glanced at these, and discovered with regret that a casket, containing jewels of great value, and, what was of still more consequence, title deeds and documents relating to the estate, was missing. Inquiries were at once made, but no one had seen it. This casket was of exquisite foreign workmanship, and the more noticeable that in those days, even amongst the nobles, articles of vertu were rare. She had herself placed it in an old cabinet, that stood in a room somewhat remote from those used on the present occasion, in the western wing of the building.

This was found to be only accessible by a ladder placed against a buttress, a pile of masonry still left standing, which on account of the woodwork that supported it having been burnt away, seemed from its tottering appearance ready to fall and crush the first daring adventurer who should approach or try to mount the ladder. Mrs. St. Clair at once offered a large reward to

any one who would bring her the casket. No one coming forward, she increased the reward, but this was also ineffectual, on account of the extremely dangerous situation of the ladder. It is true many of the men came to the spot, but after having examined the pile and ladder, they assured Mrs. St. Clair that the attempt was not practicable.

"It is too fearful a risk," said they one and all, while some of the men commented freely enough on the absurdity of trying.

"Why all the gold the good lady could give us," said one, "would not pay us for being smashed to death or burned alive, would it now?"

"To be sure it would not," rejoined another. "Not all the caskets in the universe could't tempt *me*."

"I don't think its over and above safe to stand here, much longer," muttered a third.

"Nay, masters, I would not have one of you endanger life or limb for cause of mine," said the kind and gentle lady, advancing a step towards them.

The fire, meanwhile, threatened to burn in two the only remaining rafter or crossbeam against which the ladder rested. Mrs. St. Clair entirely despaired of ever seeing the casket again, when, with the utmost horror and amazement, she beheld, not a stout fireman, but the slight form of little Isabel, ascending the dangerous ladder!

The spectators were for a moment mute with astonishment, but when they saw the young girl courageously cross the flaming rafter, and prepare to walk over the smoking, tottering ruins, which separated her from the casket, a universal shudder ran through the assembled crowd; some would have shouted to her to desist, had not the old housekeeper darted from one to the other, by look and gesture, imploring silence.

“You know that shouts and cries will only take away the poor child’s presence of mind,” she urged, “and can do no good. Don’t you see it is now quite as dangerous for her to turn back as to go on?”

At all events, it was impossible to make her

turn back, so all that remained was to watch the event in breathless silence. Isabel now, after disappearing for a few seconds, emerged from the blazing rooms she had so daringly entered. She had secured the precious casket! and held it above her head exultingly. A hastily repressed cheer burst from those below, while Mrs. St. Clair, white and motionless as a statue, gazed on the scene with anxious eyes. She saw, as in a ghastly dream, the fearful abyss of flame and smoke, above which hovered the little white figure, standing out in strong relief against the dark night sky. The cheer sent a thrill through the mother's frame, but her joy, and that of the spectators, was of short duration, for as Isabel stood upon the smouldering ruins, and looked at the now actually rocking pile of masonry on one side, and the flame and smoke that separated her from the ladder on the other, her heart appeared to sink within her, she held out her disengaged hand imploringly to the spectators, as it were begging for help—for help that could not be given—though many a one amongst the crowd

below felt as though they would have died to render aid to the brave child who stood in such desperate peril.

Isabel paused for a moment. If she stood where she was, she must inevitably perish, for the ruins threatened every instant to give way beneath her feet. Already she was scorched and half suffocated. It had occurred to her, when she first started, that she might, the casket once secured, pass through the room to a winding back staircase that was near, and so descend. But on opening the door, such a volume of smoke rushed in, as to bewilder and almost overpower her. The only chance of escape, then, was to recross the flaming rafter, though it was very doubtful if that would now bear her weight. Grasping the casket with both hands, she made a desperate rush towards the ladder, and was for a moment enveloped in a cloud of smoke.

A dead silence followed; the bystanders gave her up for lost. But no—she reappeared. The anxious throng below breathed again. "She's safe, she's safe!" resounded on all sides. A

moment later she was seen close to the ladder, her foot was on the topmost round, when the beam against which it rested, at length gave way, and the whole pile fell with a tremendous crash, burying the unfortunate Isabel in the ruins!

All present were so paralysed by this dreadful catastrophe, that no one made any effort to do anything for some time, until they were again addressed and roused by the old housekeeper, who had before remonstrated with them.

"What do you all stand here for," exclaimed she, "like a parcel of foolish staring idiots! Why don't you set to work and see if you can't help?"

This appeal, as well as the distress of poor Mrs. St. Clair, and the cries of poor little Arthur, recalled the crowd to their senses. They quickly began to remove the stones and rubbish which covered poor Isabel.

"We cannot save her life," said one of the men, "she must be killed with the weight of this huge pile of ruins."

With feelings of heart-sickening sorrow, the

work was proceeded with. The moon had set, but the scene was lighted by torches and lanterns. Not one of the men and boys, gentle or simple, but assisted; even some of the stronger amongst the women; others held lights. The rest of the ladies and children huddled together under a tree, while amongst the workers, and in and out amongst those who kept their dreary watch, flitted the tall stiff form of the poor old housekeeper, her high "mob" cap, and muslin kerchief, gleaming white and ghostly, as she now mourned and lamented for her poor lost child; now encouraged the labourers to still more strenuous exertions.

At last, after removing stone after stone, for a long time, the end of a white scarf was visible, and Isabel's mother, who till then had been looking on in silent agony, exclaimed—

"It is my child's! For mercy's sake, make haste!"

The workers redoubled their exertions, a faint scream was heard, and Isabel was discovered, not crushed and lifeless as was expected, but per-

fectly safe and uninjured ! She was lying underneath a large beam, which had fallen in a sloping direction, and which had sheltered her from the rest of the falling ruins ! It is impossible to describe the joy of Mrs. St. Clair, at this wonderful escape ; she clasped her child in her arms, and embraced her with rapture, while all present sympathized in her joy.

“ Thank you all, my friends,” said the mother at length, looking round with streaming eyes, and—she added reverently—“ I thank God.”

When the first burst of joy was over, Mrs. Pym, the old housekeeper, enquired for the casket, which had been the cause of so much trouble.

Blank looks were the sole answer ; search was made on all sides ; Isabel, on being questioned, said that when she found herself falling she flung the precious thing from her, hoping that it might be uninjured. Now, this casket being of the greatest value, Mrs. St. Clair could not help lamenting its loss aloud, saying it must have been stolen.

"Indeed," said Isabel, "I am sure no one here could steal it!"

"That's more than *you* know," returned Mrs. Pym, sharply. "There's sure to be a set of thieves and vagabonds about wherever there is the least chance of picking up anything. If I'm not greatly mistaken I saw a glimpse of an evil looking man or two, at one time, amongst the crowd. They were none of our villagers, nor any one that I know hereabouts."

Mrs. St. Clair suggested that the housekeeper had been away from the place for some years.

"Aye, aye, but I lived here in my girlish days, before you was born, Mistress, and I know the faces of our people well enough. On *their* honesty I would wager my life. They wouldn't touch anything belonging to a St. Clair, not they."

The servants all stood forth in a body. "Would they steal a thing for which the brave little lady had risked her life? Oh no!"

"Indeed my friends I believe you," said their mistress.

But where was the casket?

"If I were you, madam," said a gentleman present, addressing Mrs. St. Clair, "I would lose no time in having the casket cried in the market place of Stourbridge; and would let all the watchmen and proper authorities know of your loss, besides advertizing it in the forthcoming broadsheet."

The lady thanked him, and promised to follow his advice.

All anxiety respecting the fire being at an end, every one was naturally desirous to know how it had originated. No one, however, seemed to know anything on the subject—all the servants denied being guilty of carelessness. It seemed a mystery not to be fathomed. Incendiaries had not been uncommon of late—lawless men setting houses on fire that they might profit by the confusion to carry away rich spoils. So here the matter rested.

The company had all retired upon seeing that Isabel was safe, but not until they had offered to assist Mrs. St. Clair in any way they could;

unanimously inviting her to make a temporary home in their houses. Amongst the most earnest and pressing of these were Lady Beverley and her young son Hugh. The boy had been greatly struck by Isabel's brave conduct. He had reproached her afterwards for not sending him up the dangerous ladder. Had he not been away from the spot at the moment, getting his arm, which was severely burnt, bandaged up, she should not have gone, at least not alone! His father, Sir Lionel Beverley, was prevented by slight indisposition from being at the fête, but in his name Hugh begged Mrs. St. Clair to accept the hospitalities of the Manor. There was room in the coach beside his mother and sister Flora.

"You will indeed gratify us all by doing so, dear Madam," added Lady Beverley, while Flora clung to Isabel. The two young Beverleys were the friends that Isabel and Arthur liked best of all their juvenile guests.

Mrs. St. Clair thanked this kind family, and all her other friends, but said that she preferred remaining near home. She would pass the

remainder of the night at the porter's lodge, which was a small but comfortable place, and near St. Clair Hall; her servants could find accommodation on the lower stories, which were fortunately but little injured by the flames. The next day she should be able to form her plans. She and her children had been so accustomed to dispense with luxury, that she had no doubt they should be able to manage very well at the Lodge until the Hall was repaired. It was broad daylight when the trio, accompanied by Mrs. Pym, at length sought the repose they so much needed.

The first thing thought of when the party arose, after a few hours' rest, was naturally the casket. Fresh search was made amongst the stones and rubbish; and placards posted up in every direction for many miles round, offering a large reward to any one who would bring it, or even give tidings of it; but days, weeks, and even months passed, and not a word of intelligence was received concerning the missing treasure.

It was nearly two months before the St. Clairs could return to the Hall, although they generally spent some hours every day in watching the progress of the repairs. Very few things of value had been destroyed, though great damage to the building had of course been done. As soon as the roof was replaced, Mrs. St. Clair would not wait until all the rest of the house had been put thoroughly in order, but with her children returned to their home, grateful for the narrow escape it had had of being destroyed altogether.

CHAPTER IV.

A REVERSE OF FORTUNE.

THE little family had been back in St. Clair Hall about a fortnight, and were beginning to feel quite happy and settled again, when the post, which in those days only conveyed its written or printed news once in a week to the northern counties, brought a letter for Mrs. St. Clair, which evidently caused her great perplexity and distress. Having read it twice over, she threw it down, exclaiming—"What can this mean? It cannot surely be true!" Her children eagerly enquired what was the matter.

Mrs. St. Clair informed them that the letter was from a distant relative of their father's, whom she knew by repute as a bold unprincipled man, stating that the king and the government

had decided on transferring the St. Clair lands and estates to him, as a more fitting representative of his late respected kinsman than a puny child, almost an infant.

“ He calls on me,” Mrs. St. Clair continued, “ as a loyal subject, and for my own and children’s sake, to yield to him peaceably, as my son’s guardian, if not he is prepared to take forcible possession of what is now his own, according to the king’s grant, which he will show me if I desire it. He offers us the space of one month to move in, also our personal effects. Such domestics and retainers as we have no further occasion for, he will take into his service, knowing that the St. Clairs were always wont to have a trusty lot about them. An annual income of a hundred pounds a year, which is, he says, quite sufficient to maintain a widow and two children in comfort, will, with a small house, be allowed us. “ Fair exchange,” he adds, “ is no robbery.”

“ What a shame ! how dreadful ! how wicked ! ” were the exclamations with which the news was

received, both by the children and the faithful servants, to whom it soon spread.

What was to be done?

"Will none of those kind friends who were here on my birthday help us?" asked Isabel.

Mrs. St. Clair shook her head. "The only person of influence amongst them," she said, "is Sir Lionel Beverley, and he, as you know, was directly opposed to your father in politics—a staunch Puritan, even now disaffected towards the Stuarts, at heart; and a favour asked by him at court would be more likely to be denied than granted. Our friend Mr. Goldsac would advise me. I must go to London and see him."

"Oh, mamma! that dreadful long journey again!" exclaimed Arthur; "and to leave us behind!" And he begun to cry.

"Let us go with you, mamma," said Isabel.

"No, my dear children," answered Mrs. St. Clair. "And yet—we have never been separated one whole day in all your lives. I will take you, though it will be little pleasure, and, I fear, little profit either. Now," she added, sighing, "we

shall indeed feel the loss of that precious casket. With its aid—with the papers that it contains, we might probably make our case good. The lawyers would represent the matter to our king and parliament;—the deed was given as a security against such attempts—against the rapacity of evil men, who need but small excuse for oppressing the widow and orphans, when they know there is no strong arm to resist them. Had your uncle been alive, he would not have suffered this.”

“ But the King will remember giving the deed, mother?”

“ Nay, my child, royal personages have sometimes short memories, when it suits their own interests. Remember it was the father of our present sovereign to whom your father was so well known personally. His son—our king—was moved to do an act of justice in restoring the estates to your little brother, persuaded by the good and noble man his counsellor, who is since dead. He is now, no doubt, persuaded that he is doing an equally virtuous action in giving the

St. Clair property to the bold and ambitious Maurice, who has, it seems, lately returned from foreign parts, and who will, we may be sure, keep King Charles to his promise, when once it has been given."

Mrs. St. Clair, with a suitable retinue, set off on her journey to the metropolis the very next day, accompanied by her children, and, by dint of using great speed, and sparing no expense; getting fresh and fresh relays of horses, and often travelling till late in the evening, which, with a smaller party would (on account of highwaymen and other dangers of the roads) have been unsafe, arrived in London on the evening of the sixth day. She took up her abode at one of the best inns or hostels in the city, and scarcely pausing for rest or refreshment, went, with Isabel and Arthur, to Mr. Goldsac's house. The streets of London looked small, and seemed close and smoky to the children. "How glad I am we live in the beautiful country now," said they both. "Ah, that charming country home, will it long be ours?"

They found their good friend the merchant extremely ill, and confined to his bed. He entered, however, into the troubles of the St. Clairs, who seemed like his own family; he lifted up his hands and eyes with sorrow on hearing that the casket was not found—he was one of the few friends to whom Mrs. St. Clair wrote, and she had duly informed him of the fire and its consequences—he thought that Maurice St. Clair had probably heard of the loss of the papers, as every possible publicity had been given to it. The name—an uncommon and distinguished one, would naturally attract his attention, and he might have hastened to act upon the knowledge. Once in possession, and he might—so unscrupulous was he known to be—if by any means he could discover the casket, buy it up at any price, and destroy the papers it contained. .

The St. Clairs remained in London ten days, during which time application was made in the proper quarters, and high legal authority sought. The King declared he could not revoke the grant he had just made in favour of Maurice St. Clair,

who from some services he had already performed, and greater ones which he promised, stood high in Court favour just then—unless good cause were shown why he should do so. When told that Mrs. St. Clair had lost the document given to her son—"Why, then" (he is reported to have said, smiling), "her son, I fear must also lose his cause."

Some of his lords, amongst them the good and great Earl of Clarendon, ventured to remind the king of the services rendered to Charles I. by Major St. Clair, which were ill requited by depriving his son of the patrimony so recently restored to him by an especial deed.

"Aye," said Charles, "I may have signed such a deed amongst hundreds of others. I have done my best to restore my poor suffering subjects to their rights. It is impossible that I can remember the minute details of every case. Let the most worthy St. Clair possess the St. Clair property, by all means."

"Your majesty is indeed just and right judging," said the hypocritical Maurice, "I would ask

humbly, who is the fittest to be the head of that house, a man in the prime of life who has fought and wrestled in the good cause; or a young child—who was not, I believe even born (he added with a sneer)—not even born or heard of until his father was dead and the estates confiscated and in possession of the Roundhead, Lambert Monckton—”

“Nay, pardon me,” said Lord Clarendon severely, “but I have in my possession certificates of the boy’s birth and of his father’s death. Here they are.”

Maurice glanced at the documents.

“Yes,” he said, compulsory respect for Clarendon compelling him to courtesy. “This child was in possession of the St. Clair estates for precisely fourteen calendar months—that is to say from the time of his father’s death—September 3rd, 1651, till the forfeiture of the property, November 12th, 1652. After such a brief reign King Arthur will not feel his deposition much?”

“You forget, sir,” said Clarendon, emphatically, “his restoration in ’51. My royal master,”

added the earl, turning from Maurice to the king, "You, at least, do not forget it?"

"My dear lord," said Charles, with his usual graceful courtesy, although even then he had begun to dislike the upright and plain-spoken minister, "My dear Clarendon, I would gladly remember if I could. But memory is treacherous sometimes."

"Very," said the Minister, dryly and pointedly.

"Very," resumed the unblushing Charles. "Let them show this deed which they have—"

"Or profess to have," threw in the artful Maurice.

"Or profess to have," said the King, "otherwise let this grant which I have given to Maurice St. Clair be held valid. Torment me no more," he added testily. "These contentions and discussions rob my life of ease and pleasure. Only mind, I have heard the name of Major Arthur St. Clair mentioned with especial honour—he was a friend of my martyred father. Let all consideration be shown to his widow and orphans—you assure me they are amply provided for?"

"Amplify, my liege," said Maurice, laying his hand on his false heart.

This was all that passed in public. But it was rumoured that Maurice had given the King substantial reasons, in the form of a princely gift of bright golden pieces, for putting him in the place of the boy Arthur. Unfortunately, Charles' excessive extravagance constantly reduced him to the utmost straits for money, while, selfish and reckless, he cared little how fresh supplies were obtained.

With heavy hearts Mrs. St. Clair and her children left London. They would stay to the last in their dear old home, to which they returned with all speed, and without adventure. Precisely on the day month after the arrival of the ominous letter, several insolent servants and armed retainers of their arrogant kinsman appeared. The new steward, a hard stern man asked which of the servants were to remain.

"Not one," said old Grainger the butler, acting as spokesman for the rest. "We have eaten the bread of the true owners of these lands,

some of us for many years. I myself left the service of a noble to return to my mistress here on the restoration of the rightful heir. I stay with no alien or usurper."

"No rude words, old man; go or stay as you list," said the steward. "I was to offer a rise of wages to all who chose to enter the service of my master, that is all. He is a brave man, and a soldier."

"He is a coward and a villain," retorted Grainger, "or he would not act thus towards the widow and fatherless."

Grainger, with the other men servants and all the tenants on the estate, prayed that a forcible resistance might be offered to the usurper. But their mistress negatived this proposal, and bade her faithful adherents remember that Maurice had the King's sanction.

Only Mrs. Pym was retained by her mistress; indeed, she positively refused to leave, and that the faithful woman who had lived in the family so long should still continue to follow its fortunes seemed a matter of course.

Mr. Goldsac's illness had ended in death, the establishment in Fleet-street was broken up. The St. Clairs could no longer, had they wished it, have sought shelter in the thronging city, with their old friends.

The children were consoled by hearing that the house which their relative so magnanimously gave them instead of their own, was near the sea coast. But they were overwhelmed with grief when the time came for taking leave of all who were left behind, and when they looked for the last time at each well known room, at the trees and the terrace, and the old sundial, at all their favourite haunts. Mrs. St. Clair desired Arthur to collect all his books and toys, and bring them to her, whilst Isabel also assisted in packing up some of their treasures. The heavier luggage had been sent on by a waggon, in charge of Mrs. Pym.

It was not until late in the evening that the small party arrived at their destination. The pleasant drive through fresh scenery had revived them, and the children were full of interest and excitement at the thought of their new abode.

CHAPTER V.

LIFE AT ROCK COTTAGE.

THE children were glad when the coach stopped, and one of the postillions said, "So, please you, this be the house."

"House, indeed!" cried Isabel, "why it is quite a little cottage! Look, it is only divided from the road by this enclosure of rough stones piled loosely together, and called a wall, I suppose!"

"And no gates, or moat, or porter's lodge," lamented Arthur. "It is not much bigger than our porter's lodge."

"How different to St. Clair Hall," said both children.

"It is indeed, my dears," said their mother, "but let us try to make the best of it. It is

built of rock, and is not ugly. See, there is an ivy plant growing up the little porch, and we can plant flowers in the enclosure."

Mrs. Pym, who had preceded them by a few days, to get matters in order, received the family at the door of Rock Cottage with due ceremony. They passed through the low porch, and into the small parlour. This room had by no means an unpleasant appearance. The furniture, it is true, was simple and homely, but the children recognised here and there a favourite book or toy, or some other possession well known and valued, while a large bow pot, or vase of flowers and scented leaves, graced the window sill, and savoury odours from the kitchen greeted the hungry travellers.

"Perhaps you would like to look over the place while I set the supper," said Mrs. Pym.

This was assented to, and it was found that the other rooms of the cottage showed signs of the good housekeeper's thoughtful and loving care for the comfort of all the party. After an excellent repast, the party all felt in better spirits.

"I like these horn drinking cups quite as well as silver," said Arthur.

"And this deal table does quite as well as oak," remarked Isabel. "I think people accustomed themselves to many things they could do quite as well without. For instance—it is quite as pleasant to wait on oneself."

"Put that maxim in practice, my dear," said Mrs. St. Clair, "by clearing away the supper things. We *must* wait on ourselves chiefly, for good Mrs. Pym is old and lame, and cannot do all the work."

Presently Mrs. St. Clair asked if the children would like to go by the sea. Full of anticipated delight, they walked out, and soon the grand sight of the ocean met their gaze, its green waves rippling gently in upon a fine sandy beach.

"How lovely, how wonderful!" they exclaimed.

And there were shells, too, and sea-weed, and crabs, and rocks to climb, while further on were fishermen's huts.

Isabel remembered the castle they used to see from the hill near their old home, and asked her mother if it was near.

"I should think not, my dear," replied her mother; "however, we will ask these fishermen whether they know anything about it."

They accordingly approached a group of fishermen who were sitting before the door of a small hut, busily engaged in mending their nets. The fishermen answered Isabel's questions very civilly, and said that they had heard of such a place, and several of them had seen it; but that it was a great way off, and they seldom sailed as far as that part of the coast.

"And it is very dangerous to go near the castle in the night time," said one old man, looking up from the net he was mending.

"Why is it dangerous? and how far is it off?" asked Isabel, eagerly.

"Why, miss," answered the old man, "I believe it is some forty or fifty miles from here; and as to danger," he added, lowering his voice with an awestruck look, "it is said that it's

haunted, for strange unearthly noises have been heard there, and voices talking—although it is utterly ruined and uninhabited—and lights flashing at the dead of the night, and white forms flitting about.”

“Aye, and the clanking of chains, and the ghost of a man—a ship’s captain he was, who landed there, and died of fright at the sights he saw,” said another fisherman. “I was told by a tall, black-bearded man, with a scar on his forehead—a stranger in these parts—a bold, daring fellow, who wasn’t likely to be skeared at a trifle, and he says, ‘I’d rather face the Protector’s army single handed than go near that awful place after night-fall.’”

“Oh, if that is all the danger,” said Isabel, “it only makes me wish to see the castle still more.”

“I wouldn’t advise you to be too bold, Miss,” said the old man, whilst the others looked askance at the daring young lady, as though they thought she must have lost her senses.

“Folks do go to see it sometimes in the day time,” said another of the men.

"Well, I should not be afraid to go near it at any time," said Isabel, laughing. "You have always taught me, mother, that those stories of ghosts and of places being haunted, were only invented to frighten children and silly people."

"Those poor men are uneducated, so we must make allowance for them, my dear," said her mother, in a low tone. "But come, it is time to return home."

They accordingly thanked the fishermen for their information, and retraced their steps.

When they returned to the house Isabel stayed some time, talking to her mother, after Arthur had gone to rest, till Mrs. St. Clair said to her, "My dear child, pray go to bed now, and do not stay talking any longer; remember you must be up with the lark to-morrow, and are to be very useful."

"Oh, yes, mother, I will not forget. Good night," said Isabel, and she ran upstairs to her own little room.

The next morning she awoke very early, and not knowing what o'clock it was, got up and opened the casement, from which she saw the sun

just rising. Determined to be in good time she dressed quickly and went down stairs. Opening the shutters she saw by the timepiece—a great treasure—that it was four o'clock. The St. Clairs were fortunate in possessing a whole Bible—in those days a very expensive work—and carefully taking it from its shelf, Isabel read, as she had been taught to do, a short portion of the Holy Scriptures. She did not feel inclined to study her Roman history, so closing the volume, she indulged herself with perusing a few pages of the wonderful poem by a new poet, not many years published—namely, Milton's *Paradise Lost*; a copy of which had been one of her birthday presents. "How beautiful it is! What a pity he is a Puritan!" thought Isabel.

Her reading was interrupted by the entrance of Arthur.

"It is past six o'clock, and I want my breakfast," said he.

"Oh dear! Mrs. Pym is not up yet. I dare say she is weary. Let us light the fire. It will be good sport. Do you find some dry kindling

sticks, while I strike a light. I know where the tinder box is."

In ten minutes the little boy returned with a very green faggot. Isabel was some time striking a light, having never used flint and steel before. At last she lighted a match, and piled her materials on the dog irons.

"Now," she said, "we shall soon have a good fire; and will hang the pot up to boil. It is empty. Can you fill it from that pitcher? Luckily we have not got to draw water from the well."

Let not our young readers, accustomed to all the modern conveniences and luxuries of the present day, laugh at these two children, on hearing that Arthur overturned and broke the heavy stone pitcher, wetting his clothes and cutting his hand, while Isabel, having comforted him as well as she could, found herself, at the expiration of an hour, with several burnt bundles of matches, a pile of wet wood, and no symptoms of a fire, beyond a strong smell of brimstone.

As the clock struck seven, the usual breakfast

hour, Mrs. Pym appeared, apologising for having over-slept herself.

“Nice servants you would make, young master and miss,” she said, with a grim smile and shake of the head; “but of course it’s not your vocation.”

“But we have heads and hands,” said Isabel, very crest fallen. “So why can’t we light a fire?”

Mrs. Pym produced a few dry shavings, and showed Isabel how to manage so as to get a current of air to draw up the fire; and then, with the help of a labouring man to whom she had promised a trifling remuneration if he would come daily to draw a bucket of water from the well in the yard, the pot was hung on to its hook, and there was promise of breakfast at no distant period.

“Where is the milk for the porridge?” asked Arthur.

The children were accustomed to this simple fare. Indeed, tea and coffee were articles of great expense and luxury. His mother, who now

came down, said that the children might run across to a neighbouring farm and see if they could procure milk. This they were delighted to do, and soon returned with bright rosy faces, and a good supply of milk and cream; also of rich yellow butter.

After the morning meal a consultation was held as to the respective duties to be performed by each member of the small household. Mrs. Pym had such an idea of the family dignity that she could not bear the thought of their doing much in the way of work; but Mrs. St Clair urged that it would do Isabel no harm to learn the lighter domestic duties under the housekeeper's direction. Meanwhile the children should continue their studies under their mother's guidance, she being accomplished, and a fair scholar. This would do very well—at least, for the present. Arthur's share in the work was to gather dry sticks everyday—Mrs. Pym had got a stack of wood—and perform any light tasks allotted to him. A strong girl could no doubt be found in the village of Greystock, to do the roughest por-

tion of the work. Indeed, the woodman's daughter, Mrs. Pym thought, by name Molly Jenkyns, would gladly come for a mere trifle and her food. Then the question arose as to whether they could afford to keep a pony, recently given to the children. Both pleaded hard to have their favourite ; and Mrs. St. Clair consented—there being a shed in the yard, and a small paddock at the end of the garden attached to Rock Cottage. Donald, the pony, was a hardy little animal, well accustomed to hilly roads, and as gentle as a lamb, either for riding, or driving in a little cart.

The consultation over, Isabel and Arthur were impatient for another sea-side ramble, but their mother reminded them that there was much to be done first ; although the regular studies were not to begin for a week, when they would be more accustomed to the new way of life. Thus reminded, the children set to work, and with some trouble got through their allotted tasks. Isabel had expressed a wish to undertake the cooking occasionally. "If you are really in earnest," said Mrs. Pym, "you can begin to-day, which will

leave me free to go to the town on some important errands. A good man I know has offered to give me a lift in his cart. Poor dears," she muttered, half to herself, "it is sad they should come to this—and no coach to ride in, or footmen, or—"

"Indeed, Mrs Pym, we like running on the sands quite as well as taking an airing in the coach. Now I am quite ready to be told about dinner."

Mrs. Pym showed her how to prepare some vegetables, which were to be put in a large pot with mutton, leaving particular instructions as to the boiling and skimming ; and how to keep up a proper fire. Mrs. St. Clair had some accounts to look over, and was not to be disturbed until the dinner hour.

Having done all the first portion of her task, Isabel thought it very tiresome to stay indoors watching the slow process of cooking, and yielded willingly to Arthur's entreaties that she would come out with him. The beach proved most attractive, everything was forgotten but racing with

the waves and picking up shells. At last the position of the sun reminded the truants that it must be past dinner-time, and Isabel thought of the stew !

She hastened home with some misgivings, to find the fire out, and the meat almost raw. Mrs. St. Clair, who had finished her writing, and Mrs. Pym, just returned, laden with parcels and a large market basket, met her at the same moment. Neither said much on hearing what had occurred, seeing how Isabel reproached herself for her thoughtlessness. It was suggested to make a light meal of oat cake and cheese, and reserve the stew for supper. All were merry and hungry except Isabel, who at first was neither, but she soon joined in the laugh against herself, and promised to do better next time.

By-and-bye Mrs. St. Clair went to see the girl, Molly Jenkyns ; Arthur to fetch the afternoon milk, and Isabel on an errand to the village. She was walking slowly homewards, for it was a sultry autumn evening, when her attention was attracted by a party of boys who were standing

close to a large pond by the road-side. She approached them in order to see what they were doing ; and she saw that one of them held in his arms a little black and tan spaniel, round whose neck another boy was fastening a cord, whilst a third held a large brick.

“What are you going to do with that poor animal ?” enquired Isabel, looking at the dog, which wagged its tail, played with the cord round its neck, and licked the hands of its tormentors.

“We are going to drown it,” was the reply.

“Drown it !” repeated Isabel, “how can you be so cruel ! But what do you want to drown it for ?”

“Why, mother says she can’t afford to keep so many dogs, we’ve got five or six, and the handsome pups are bespoke. But this one is lean and ugly, and I tried to sell it at Greystock market all this morning but couldn’t.”

“Give me the poor thing rather than drown it,” said Isabel.

“What will you give for it,” said the boy.

"How much do you want?"

"You shall have it for one shilling. He's a real King Charles."

"Oh dear ! I have only six-pence."

"That won't do," said the boy.

"You can't value the dog, if—"

"We were going to have sport with it, you see."

"How wicked ! how cruel !" cried Isabel.

"Come," said another of the boys, "let the little lady have him, since she wishes it, and take the sixpence."

The boy almost threw the dog to Isabel, who took the poor animal in her arms, and hastened home.

At the door she met Arthur, watching for her.

"How long you have been, Isabel. I thought you were lost," said he.

"You will not wonder when I tell you my adventure," answered his sister, smiling and showing the dog.

"Oh, what a pretty little creature ! Wherever did you get it ?"

Isabel told him in few words ; then ran to ask

her mother's leave to keep her prize. "It shall have some of my meat," she urged, "and be no expense."

"And some of mine, too!" threw in Arthur.

Mrs. St. Clair said they might keep the dog.

Isabel thanked her, and said she should call it Fairy, it was so small and pretty. "It is very young and will learn to love me, and may love you too, Arthur, and all of us."

Supper was ready, and afterwards the children had a scamper on the sands, with Fairy; the poor dog seeming very grateful for the food and kindness bestowed on it.

By eight o'clock Isabel was so tired she could scarcely keep her eyes open; and as soon as her mother had read the evening prayers, was glad to go to bed; feeling she had passed a pleasant if fatiguing day.

She was awakened at daybreak by Fairy barking to be let in. The dog had slept on a rush mat outside his mistress's door, and soon became a favourite and faithful companion; remarkable for his beauty, intelligence, and attachment.

Molly Jenkyns bade fair to prove a good and

useful servant, although she required much training. A rustic in those days was a rustic indeed,—barefooted, ignorant, with unkempt hair, and the roughest possible notions of tidiness. But Molly was naturally both quiet and docile, and Isabel found pleasure in imparting domestic knowledge to her. The girl's admiration for both Isabel and Arthur was unbounded. The children were allowed to teach her to read, from Arthur's horn-book, as a reward for her good conduct. She was tall and strong, and soon took much trouble off Mrs. Pym's hands. Isabel was always on the alert to admit Molly every morning at daybreak ; and to superintend her labours.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RUNAWAY.

THE remaining summer and early autumn months passed in this manner—without anything remarkable occurring—passed happily and profitably ; the children from constant exercise, and living half the day out in the sea air, were stronger and healthier than they had ever been before ; and had made good progress in their studies.

One fine day, a month after their first arrival at the sea side, Mrs. St. Clair came into the room where Isabel was practising her last guitar lesson, and said—

“My dear child, I have been very much pleased with your conduct lately ; you have shown great diligence and perseverance in regu-

larly performing your household duties, before you thought of amusing yourself; you have conquered the bad habit you had of lying in bed late of a morning; and you have been a great help and comfort to me.

“Arthur, too, has done his best to be of use, and has learned his lessons well. As a reward I intend to take you both for a long drive, in a little cart; such as you have often wished for, and which I have got for you. Donald will, no doubt, draw us very nicely.”

The children were delighted; they could scarcely stay for breakfast, and when the pony-cart came round, led by the village blacksmith—a great man in his way—Isabel jumped in first, and begged to be allowed to drive.

“You may,” said her mother, “if you will be careful, for remember, you have not had much practice.”

“Indeed, I am sure I can drive very well,” replied Isabel, in a confident tone.

Mrs. St. Clair and Arthur got in, and the party drove off, followed by Fairy. After a pleasant

drive over hill and dale of several miles, a halt was made. Donald's bridle was loosened, that he might feed on a patch of grass, whilst the children ran about and gathered wild flowers, and their mother read a book of poems. Presently they resumed their drive, taking Fairy, who was tired, into the cart. Before long the children began to complain of hunger.

"Isabel," said Mrs. St. Clair, "where are the pasty and hard eggs that I desired you to put into the cart?"

"Oh, dear," exclaimed Isabel, "I set the basket down for a moment, and never thought of it again."

"That was very careless, my dear; you should always do what you have to do at once. It is a great fault of yours not paying sufficient attention to trifles. I think we had better go on until we come to some farm or wayside inn, where we may obtain refreshment."

Accordingly they drove on at Donald's best pace, but the road was lonely; they were evidently in a remote district, amongst the hills.

All were struck with the beauty of the scenery ; wild crags and valleys, in which might be traced the windings of a river, with here and there graceful pine and ash trees. Presently Mrs. St. Clair said—

“ My dear Isabel, I wish you would not drive so fast down hill, and take such very sharp turns, nor yet drive over all the large stones in your way. The road is so rough and steep here—had you not better give me the reins? ”

“ Oh, no ! dear mother ; I will be more careful.”

“ Look, what very high mountains,” said Arthur. “ Are those what Isabel was reading about—that the Roman General crossed. The Alps, I think they were called? ”

Isabel could not help laughing. Mrs. St. Clair was correcting the little boy’s mistake, when a sudden and violent jerk nearly threw them all out of the chaise, Donald at the same moment stumbling and falling on his knees.

“ If you had been attending to your driving instead of laughing at your brother, my dear,”

said Mrs. St. Clair, "you would not have driven over these large flints."

"I beg your pardon, dear Arthur," said Isabel.

"Oh, never mind," said Arthur, good naturedly. "But what is the matter with Donald? See, he is quite lame."

All alighted to examine the pony, and it appeared that not only was one knee broken, but that his foot was also much cut by a sharp stone. It evidently hurt the poor animal extremely to walk, for on being led on he limped and could hardly proceed. Whilst the party were lamenting the accident, and debating what was to be done, a pleasant looking country woman came up, with an empty ale can and provision basket, evidently returning from the fields, with three or four healthy, merry children following her. She stopped on seeing the travellers, and asked what was the matter, civilly offering any assistance in her power. Mrs. St. Clair told her in a few words, and the woman said her farm was near; they had better come in and rest, while her hus-

band would look to the pony. She sent one of her boys to fetch "father," who was "harvesting." An honest, intelligent looking farmer soon appeared, greeted the gentlefolks frankly, and after examining Donald's hurts, pronounced them rather severe.

"One of my men is a pretty good farrier," he added, "we must take the pony to the stables, and he shall see to it."

Mrs. St. Clair thanked the farmer, and they proceeded to the homestead. The travellers soon found themselves in a large comfortable kitchen; the children were amused with the huge fireplace, with settles in the chimney corners, and fitches of bacon hanging in racks from the ceiling.

The farmer soon came in, he looked attentively at his unexpected guests, then said—

"I take it you are Royalists, like myself; Puritans do not wear such long curls" (he glanced at the children's). "~~We~~ have few except Puritans about here, and I don't like them. You must surely want refreshment. Bring out the best we have got, wife, if you'll excuse homely fare, madam?"

The farmer's wife quickly brought oaten bread, new laid eggs, a bowl of cream, and a goodly ham; a welcome sight to our party, who had been so many hours in the open air without anything to eat.

In the course of conversation, it transpired that Farmer Stockwell—such was their host's name—had served in the Royalist army, and had known Major St. Clair, to whose company he belonged.

"The major was very kind to me," added Mr. Stockwell, "in particular when I had a fever, and lay sick in the camp, along with many others; just before the battle of Naseby. To think of my meeting with his family!"

On going round to visit Donald, the labourer who was attending to him said that with rest and care, the pony would be well in a week. That he could not travel at present was obvious.

"Leave him with me, and I'll get him cured, and bring him over myself, madam," said the farmer.

"You are very obliging, but how are we to

get home?" said the lady. "We must be twelve or fifteen miles off. I doubt whether we can walk that distance before nightfall."

The farmer considered a moment. "I have a pony," he said, "but though not vicious, he is very apt to run away and play tricks. Mayhap you would not be able to manage him; or else we might put Brownie in your cart, and you keep him till I bring your pony home again."

Mrs. St. Clair said she thought she could manage. Her husband had taught her to drive.

"This is my pony," said the farmer, leading the way to that part of the rough stabling where stood a pony, which (but for the children's affectionate regard for their shaggy favourite) would have made Donald appear very common in their eyes, by contrast. It had a glossy bay coat, and its finely formed head and slender legs showed its high breeding.

"What a handsome creature!" was the general exclamation.

"But Donald is quite as pretty in his way," added Arthur.

"Brownie looks fit for a princess to ride," observed Isabel.

"Aye Miss," said the farmer. "I took him for a bad debt, or I should never have had such a pony."

Isabel saw a side saddle and bridle hanging up, and was immediately seized with a strong wish to ride.

"By all means," said the farmer, "but he is rather fresh—has done little work lately, not being up to my weight; and has been high fed, because I thought of selling him."

"My dear Isabel—" began Mrs. St. Clair.

"Dear mother, do let me! I have ridden Donald, even without a saddle, and will be so careful."

"Well, if kind Mr. Stockwell thinks it safe, and will look after you;" said her mother, hesitatingly.

So the pony was quickly saddled, and Isabel mounted in great glee. She threw aside her cloak; and her long flowing skirt of dark green cloth, and tight fitting boddice, made, with the

grey beaver hat and plume of feathers, a suitable and becoming riding habit. As she shook back the silken curls from her bright, excited face, sitting easily and gracefully on her beautiful steed, which curvetted and arched its neck as if proud of its light burden, the farmer said—

“I can trace a strong likeness in that bonny lassie to her father, as he used to look in our young days, years ago! A gallant cavalier he was, too!”

The good farmer brought out a pretty, light riding whip, which he begged Isabel to accept. “But,” he said, “be careful how you use it with this pony.”

Isabel rode very quietly at first, cantering up and down, in a field near the house; till Arthur came up to her and said—

“We are going to see the corn being stacked, will you come with us?”

“Oh, certainly,” she answered, and trotted on to join her mother and the farmer.

They had proceeded some distance, Isabel cantering on, and then coming back to the

others; when the pony shied at a heap of stones.

"Let me lead him past, Miss," said the farmer.

"Oh no, thank you," said the young equestrian, "I can manage him myself."

"Well, you have a good seat, and good courage," said Mr. Stockwell, admiringly.

With management, the pony was induced to overcome his aversion to the stoneheap, but he was evidently chafing, and his mettle was up. He put back his ears, and reared; whilst a light touch of the whip rendered him still more restive.

"Take care, Miss," said the farmer, getting nervous. "Let me lead him a bit."

"Isabel, do as you are advised," said her mother.

"He is quite quiet now," said the wilful Isabel. She cantered on till she was a good way ahead of the rest—Brownie pulling hard—and the canter, in spite of the rider's efforts to check his speed, soon becoming a hand-gallop. Presently the

horse shied again at a fallen tree ; then on Isabel's imprudently giving a touch with her whip, he kicked and plunged violently, as though wishing to throw his rider. But Isabel, who had been taught to keep her seat, was not thrown ; and after a short struggle, the pony jumped over a low wall, and raced away at his utmost speed, clearing all obstacles ; while Isabel felt utterly powerless to check, much less to stop his course. She resisted a momentary impulse to throw herself from her saddle, recollecting to have heard that it was imprudent to do so. In her alarm, Isabel called and screamed to her mother and the farmer for assistance, but they were far behind her. " Oh dear !" she thought to herself, " how I wish I had followed their good advice ; but it is too late now !" Meanwhile the pony kept galloping on, taking—although Isabel knew it not at the time—a short and dangerous cut across country—hilly, and abounding in steep crags, and paths that only a chamois-hunter would venture to traverse. Presently she perceived that the path, or rather track, grew narrower and narrower at every step.

On one side rose an almost perpendicular rock; on the other, a precipice overhung a deep lake. The space between the cliff and the precipice was small—at one point so small as to convey the idea that a person on foot, even, could not pass along it with safety. To this narrow pass the pony was making its way! With a glance the young girl took in all the horror of her situation. She pulled wildly at the pony's bridle—pulled with the strength and energy of despair—hoping to make him stop and turn back before it was too late; but he took the bit between his teeth, and sprang madly onwards.

Isabel abandoned herself to her fate. Involuntarily she closed her eyes, and clung convulsively to the saddle-bow, as she felt she was being borne along the dangerous defile. Then, like a brave Christian child, she commended her soul to God.

What a crowd of thoughts may flash through the mind in a few seconds of time, those who have been in a similar situation of imminent peril alone can tell. Like a picture, or series of pictures, vivid and luminous, the chief scenes

of Isabel's short but eventful life rose before her—her mother, her little brother ; she thought of their sorrow. Another moment and Brownie had borne her away from the danger ; the road had widened, the lake in whose gloomy depths she had expected to find a grave, was left behind ; and she was flying along over the now level ground, at the same breathless pace as before ! But her spirits rose at the thought of her wonderful escape, and she reflected that the pony must get tired in time, and stop. "Then," said she, to herself, "no doubt I can make him carry me steadily back ; by some safe, if longer road. There must be one, and oh ! how glad I shall be to get to my dear mother again !"

But her adventure was not to end in this happy manner. After racing along for some time longer Brownie slackened his pace a little ; he was crossing a smooth grassy slope, when he stepped into a hole in the ground, that was concealed by the long turf, stumbled, was unable to regain his footing, and fell, throwing Isabel over his head to the ground, where she lay stunned and insensible.

CHAPTER VII.

“ WITCHES’ GLEN.”

WHEN Isabel recovered consciousness, she gazed wonderingly around; but soon calling to mind what had happened, she looked about for the pony, expecting to see him grazing near, but Brownie was not in sight. When she rose, feeling much bruised and shaken, a sharp pain in one of her ankles caused her to sink back with a cry. After a few minutes she tried again, but again the extreme pain caused her to desist. In great distress, the poor girl covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

After a time a well-known bark made her look up. It was her little dog Fairy! She caressed the faithful creature.—“ Dear little Fairy,” she said, “ how ever did you find me—how

heated and weary you are, good Fairy—kind little dog! Now I am not alone!”

Half an hour passed, when a rustling noise attracted Isabel's attention, and she saw, hobbling towards her, an old woman, leaning on a stick, and carrying a pitcher of water. She was poorly and scantily clad, but the expression of her brown and wrinkled face was by no means repulsive. She started on seeing Isabel, and nearly let fall her pitcher.

“Who are you,” she said in a harsh quavering voice, “that dare to venture here? Do you not know that this is Witches' Glen, and that I am old Betty Blake, commonly called Black, who have lived here all alone for years and years?”

Isabel in a few words told her story. She had been taught by her mother, who was in advance of the age in this respect, to disbelieve in witchcraft and similar superstitions. She was a sensible child, and although feeling a little nervous, as was natural, she trusted to her instincts, which told her she had nothing to fear from the person before her, and she was also reassured by observ-

ing that her little dog evidently had no aversion to the so-called Witch.

After a short pause, the old woman, seeming pleased that the girl showed no repugnance towards her, said in a more gentle manner,

“ I live in a small hut not far off, on the other side of the thicket. If you are not afraid to venture, you are welcome to some food and a night's shelter.”

Isabel thanked her, and slowly rising, crept painfully along in the direction indicated; followed by Fairy.

At another time she would have admired the surrounding scenery—a glen with woody depths, through which here and there streamed the rays of the setting sun; while beyond were moss-covered rocks, and a little brook rippled over its pebbly bed, forming a pool near the hut.

The hut itself was formed partly of rude logs of wood, partly from a natural cavity in the rock. It contained but few articles of furniture, and these of the most coarse and primitive description—a roughly hewn table and a three-legged

stool were the chief of these. In one corner stood an old wooden chest containing oat-meal; in another a rude fire place, formed of two or three tiles; and near it an iron pot, with a few more household utensils.

A whole family of fowls just going to roost, flew out, cackling, alarmed at the strangers, more especially at Fairy; two goats were at the doorway, also a large fierce looking grey cat, which retired growling to a dark corner, whence its eyes glared like coals of fire.

Dame Blake made Isabel sit down, and examined her ankle, which she pronounced to be badly sprained. She bathed it in cold water, and then hobbling out of the hut, returned with a handful of dock leaves, with which she tenderly and skilfully bandaged the injured limb. Isabel felt much less pain, and thanked her hostess, who now made preparations for supper, by milking one of the goats, and placing a few oaten cakes on the hot embers.

Isabel asked Dame Blake if there was any one

at hand who would take a message to her mother, at a neighbouring farm.

“It is clear you are a stranger in these parts,” answered the old woman with a shake of the head, “or you would be aware that nobody ever comes near *me*. What with my solitary life and my animals, all the country folk take me for a witch, and as I prefer being alone, I have encouraged the idea. I fled away from the world on the death of my husband and son, who were cruelly murdered.—I could not bear my home after that. And, except twice a year, I never see a soul. Then a travelling pedlar comes round, who knew me long ago, and is not afraid of me. He brings me a sack of oatmeal, and a few other necessaries.”

“Do you think the pedlar will come soon?” eagerly asked Isabel.

“Nay—he was here a week ago, and will not come again this side of Christmas.”

“How far is Wyke Farm from here?” Isabel enquired.

“Some eight or nine miles by the regular

roadway. Very few would dare venture by the lake pass."

Isabel explained that she had come by it, and the old woman said :—" Then you have had indeed a wonderful escape ! The lake is too deep to fathom. Some have fallen in, but their bodies were never discovered. A dreadful whirlpool sucks down everything that falls into it, I've heard."

Isabel shuddered. She thought how unhappy her mother, brother, and the family at the farm would be about her, and was hardly able to comply with Dame Blake's hospitable invitation to supper. She took a draught of milk from the wooden bowl, and ate a morsel of oat-cake ; then weary and worn out, she was glad to lie down on a simple couch of rushes and dried moss, which the old woman had made for her, with a coarse but clean woollen coverlet. She was not able to sleep much during the early part of the night, but towards morning fell into a heavy slumber, from which she was awoke by the cackling of the fowls.

She lay still, watching her strange hostess, who sat in the doorway of the hut, mumbling half audibly the words of a book or portion of a book that she held in her hands ; pausing, and shaking her head often as if at some long or difficult word. Listening attentively, Isabel recognized a verse of St. Matthew's Gospel. This increased her confidence, for it must be owned she had felt somewhat timid—the belief in witches at that time being all but universal. “Witches do not read the Bible,” said the girl to herself. The reading over, the leaves were laid carefully aside on a shelf cut roughly in the rock. When we recollect that even in the reign of the next king, James II, a load of hay was given for one single leaf of the Epistle of St. James, it will not be a matter of surprise that Isabel thought her humble hostess fortunate in possessing what seemed to be at least a score of printed pages.

Her civil “Good morning, Dame Blake,” was answered by an enquiry how the injured limb was. It proved to be terribly swollen, and in a high state of inflammation. The old woman fomented

it with herbs steeped in hot water, and Isabel thanked her gratefully, and said it would soon be well. She was glad of some food, and feeling sure that her mother and the farmer would soon find her out, her spirits rose, and she entered with interest into the details of this solitary being's mode of life.

It seemed that Dame Blake, lame as she was, contrived to cultivate a small patch of land, which had originally been made into a garden by the previous owner of the hut. Here she grew a few potatoes, some grain for the hens, and herbs of various kinds. Isabel in her turn recounted many particulars of the stirring and memorable events of the last thirty years. The girl was a graphic, if somewhat partial historian. Dame Blake's sympathies, however, were with Cromwell and the Puirtans. "Not that I hold with them for killing the king," she said, "murder is a dreadful thing."

During the long day that Isabel perforce remained at the hut, she told the Dame the chief events of her life—the reverses of fortune, the fire,

the loss of the casket, and of her residence at Rock Cottage. She spoke of her mother and Arthur, "you will be sure to see them;" she added, "when they come for me. I wonder how soon it will be?"

But the day waned, the long evening shadows fell, and no welcome step or voice was heard, in the remote nook. Then Isabel began to question Dame Blake. "Was there no possible way of letting those at the farm know of her whereabouts; or communicating with the village, which was somewhat nearer? Surely Farmer Stockwell did not believe in that false story of —"

"Witches—No doubt he does, child."

"But my mother does not. If she did, she would brave a hundred witches, to find me!"

Night came again; and Isabel, after watching until late, and making her ankle worse by perpetually trying to use it, crept to her lowly couch; and sleep, which happily does not long forsake the young and innocent, soon stole upon her, in spite of her anxiety.

Next morning she was awake and stirring be-

fore Dame Blake, and limping as far as the brook, she filled the pitcher, desirous to be of some little use. The goats and fowls came round her. These creatures were tame, and did not, after the first, seem alarmed at the gentle girl's presence. Isabel gathered some cabbage leaves for the goats, and threw a few crumbs to the chickens. She was startled by sounds of growling, and barking, and saw Fairy and the gray cat Grip, engaged in a pitched battle. The little dog would probably have fared the worst had not the Dame come to the rescue. She reprimanded Isabel with some severity for giving her injured leg no chance of recovery. "Mark my words," she said, "you will not get well this month or more, unless you are patient and keep quiet. Now, come in, and have your breakfast. I have got a nice fresh egg for you."

Isabel bore this reproof meekly. All the morning she sat in the doorway, watching ; but no one came.

"Is it not strange?" she said.

"Tell me," the old woman rejoined, "had you

not on a cap of some sort, when you set forth on the pony?"

"Oh yes," replied Isabel, rather impatiently, "to be sure; and I had a little broidered scarf—my mother's work; but I lost them just by that dreadful lake."

"They might have fallen in?"

"Yes; my riding whip I know I let fall, I felt it slip from my hand."

"Very likely then, your friends, seeking for you, found these things, and made up their minds that you, too, had fallen into the lake and were drowned."

Isabel clasped her hands. "Ah, I never thought of that! My poor dear mother, how unhappy she would be! But Brownie—the pony, you know, would go home?"

"Aye, if it did, they might still have hopes. But what if some ill-disposed person stole him! By your account he was a beauty."

Isabel bore up bravely till night fall, then quite overcome by her feelings, burst into a flood of tears. After a time Dame Blake spoke kind

and soothing words to her. "If they do not come to you, my girl, you will, by and bye, be able to go back to them. God has sent you this trial, and you must e'en bear it. Have you no faith in Him, my child?"

Isabel dried her tears, and said yes; she would try and be patient.

"You can read a deal better than I can, no doubt," said Betty Blake. "Would you like to read a little in my book?"

"Yes, very much," answered Isabel. So the precious pages were brought out, and the girl read in her sweet clear voice several chapters, to the old woman's great satisfaction.

The next day was Sunday; Dame Blake always observed that day after her own fashion, doing no work, and giving her animals extra food. She and Isabel had a good deal of serious conversation.

Then, as it grew dusk, and they sat by the smouldering fire, Dame Blake related many events of her former life. Her father was a thriving farmer, and she led a busy active life,

both with him, and after her marriage. Her husband was a miller, and they had an only son, the pride and comfort of their lives. It seemed that father and son, the latter a fine youth of nineteen, were returning home, accompanied by a servant, with a large sum of money that had just been paid to the miller, when they were way-laid by some ruffians, who, as the old man refused to give up his money, took his life, and that of the brave young son, who fought for him. The servant was severely wounded, and left for dead. He however survived, to bring home the sad news to his mistress. "Spare my father—he is an old man," were the last words of the brave youth. "Though I believe," added Betty, with emotion, "that my husband would not have cared if they would have let Jamie escape! This was twenty-five years ago," she concluded, "and well nigh mad with affliction, I disposed of the mill and other property, and fled away to this wild abode, where I have dwelt ever since."

The pedlar, whose half-yearly visits were Dame Blake's only connecting link with the

outer world, was the same faithful man who had nearly lost his life, in defending his master in the fatal fray. He now and then brought her a broadsheet or a small book, amongst the latter one the recluse prized highly a copy of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," then a recent publication, distributed by hawkers to the people in the form of a tract. Isabel had never yet seen this work, afterwards so celebrated, and its perusal wiled away many a weary hour of her stay at the hut.

This was much longer than she anticipated. Her ankle mended slowly, for it was a most severe sprain, and she constantly retarded its recovery by trying to use it too soon.

More than a fortnight passed, and she was still unable to walk more than a short distance ; when fretting and anxiety, aided possibly by a chill taken through staying out late by the brook, in a drizzling rain, brought on a fever. For many days she was seriously, even dangerously ill, and lay helpless on her little couch, Dame Blake nursing her with care and tenderness. The treatment was extremely simple, consisting

merely of herb tea, keeping the patient quiet, and leaving the rest to nature. Fortunately Isabel had a good constitution, which had never been tried by over indulgence, late hours, or a too strict course of study. Her disorder took a favourable turn, and the good dame was rewarded by seeing that her young patient, although extremely weak, was in a fair way to recover. After a long heavy slumber, Isabel looked around her, and presently said—

“I have been ill a long time, have I not? and given you a great deal of trouble, Dame.”

“Never think of that,” said old Betsy, kindly. “Drink this posset, and try to sleep again.”

Hearing his mistress’s voice, Fairy, who was lying at her feet, came wagging his tail joyfully to claim her notice. Isabel, with a smile, feebly stroked his silky head.

“Ah, that’s a faithful, loving creature,” said the dame. “Grip and he don’t quarrel now. We might learn a deal from animals, if we would.”

The invalid's chief suffering for the next week was from hunger, Dame Blake being extremely strict in regard to the diet of a sick or convalescent person. Very weak gruel, and milk diluted with water, were all the girl had. But then, had she not chamomile tea, "as good as any cordial," the dame said.

When at last she was indulged with an egg and a piece of oaten cake, it seemed to Isabel she was feasting. Animal food was out of the question, for the old woman never dreamed of killing and eating any of her live stock. Cabbage and kail varied the repasts, with occasionally a roasted potato.

As Isabel grew stronger, she exercised her culinary skill in making an omelette, as Mrs. Pym had taught her. This the dame pronounced to be a dish fit for the Lord Mayor; while once or twice she made a kind of pasty with some cranberries that grew near, and it was considered nice, but rather sour!

Isabel felt so grateful for Betty Blake's kindness, that she resolved to do her utmost to make

her some amends ; and the effort, as always is the case when we unselfishly strive to benefit another, resulted in good to herself. She became more cheerful, more hopeful, and, having wisely set herself to make the best of her present circumstances, the time passed neither wholly unpleasantly nor unprofitably. She read much to the old woman, and ransacked the stores of her memory for Betty's benefit. She knew by heart many pieces of poetry, could recite long passages from Shakespeare, from the "Fairy Queen," and from "Paradise Lost." The last gave her hearer the most pleasure, as being of a serious character. She was much interested in hearing about the great poet, Mr. Milton.

"So he is blind, poor man, is he?" she would say pityingly. "What a scholar you are, to know so much! And that wonderful man, the foreigner, whose name I never can remember, who found out about the earth and stars moving, with his great spy glass!"

"Galileo," said Isabel. "How ungrateful to put him in prison!"

It was not until the close of the sixth week of her stay at the hut, that Isabel was strong enough to set out on her homeward journey.

The eve of her departure had come, and Betty Blake, who at first had thought the girl's presence a trouble, now expressed regret at the thought of losing one whose pleasant, gentle ways had endeared her to the lonely creature's heart.

The pair, so strangely thrown into intimate companionship, between whom had arisen a mutual sympathy and regard, sat talking together late on the last evening of the girl's stay.

The conversation turned on witches.

"It is strange, indeed, that people should take you for one," Isabel remarked, "you are so good and kind."

The old woman shook her head. "Maybe some of your friends will believe I bewitched you, to keep you so long here," she said. "That old nurse or housekeeper you told me of, for one!"

Isabel coloured; for she remembered that Mrs.

Pym shared the popular belief in witches. She simply said—

“My nurse would never think anything but kindly of one who had been such a true friend to me.”

“You see,” pursued Betty, “that I am unmolested up here. When a poor witch is suspected, it is hard times for her. She is ducked, you know, to see if she be innocent or guilty.”

“Yes,” said Isabel, “and if she sinks she is innocent ; if she swims she is a witch, and must be burned.”

“Aye ! see the cunning of that, my dear. Either way, she dies ! As I once heard a good-for-nothing-fellow say—‘It’s a fine device for getting rid of disagreeable old women !’ ”

Isabel said she was sure her mother would wish to make Betty some compensation for her kindness.

“Do not speak of that !” cried the old woman with energy, “I have done no more than my duty. What did you read or repeat about exercising hospitality, and so entertaining

angels unawares? And you have been an angel to me, child!"

As she spoke, she took up one of Isabel's slender hands and kissed it. This was the only caress, beyond a gentle stroke of her curls, that the old dame had ever bestowed upon the girl. Isabel, moved, threw her arms round Betty Blake's neck, and kissed her faded cheek.

"Bless you, my child, bless you," said the old woman. "Love and fear God wherever you may be," she added solemnly. "The young are apt to forget Him. Go, fight the fight of this world with a good courage—perchance many trials yet await you. Methinks there is something in that face, bright and fair as it is, that tells me so. Keep a good heart, and a prayerful spirit, and fear nought but sin!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A PAINFUL JOURNEY.

It was a clear, bright autumn morning when Isabel set off on her homeward journey. The weather was unusually mild and pleasant for the time of year, and her heart beat high with excitement and joyful anticipation.

She had contrived to make herself a little cap, to replace the hat she had lost, and had adorned it with a tuft of white cock's feathers. In her hand she carried a small basket of woven rushes, that contained her stock of provisions.

She was somewhat thin and pale, but set out with a brisk step, followed by Fairy, who was scarcely less excited than his mistress, and whose droll gambols amused her as they went.

Isabel intended going direct to Rock Cottage,

as she felt sure her mother and Arthur would have returned to their home. Old Betty had given minute directions how to go to the sea-side, and once there, she should, she thought, easily find her way by keeping along the coast.

Her ankle was still weak, and the ground being rough and hilly, she had scarcely made so much progress as she had hoped to do, when the position of the sun told her it was noon. Sitting down on a grassy mound, she took some of her boiled eggs and oat cake, giving Fairy an ample share, and quenched her thirst at a little tarn, or mountain lake. Then, refreshed, she went on again, over wild, uninhabited country, until she came to a thick wood. This made her fear she had mistaken Dame Blake's directions, for no wood had been specified. Having walked for several hours she again rested, and ate the remainder of her provisions. "The wood leads westward," she said, as she entered it. "How lonely it is! Perhaps I shall come to a forester's hut, and be able to ask my way."

Wandering on till night-fall, Isabel, cold, tired, and hungry, paused to consider. Her dog gave

a short bark, and ran on before, as if wishing her to follow. She did so, though the brushwood in that part was thick. "This wood," she said to herself, "cannot be interminable, though it really almost appears so." At length she saw a tree that had evidently been felled with an axe: It was lying on the ground, its branches partially chopped off. A pathway too was visible. This she eagerly followed, and presently came to a small clearance, in which stood a woodman's hut. Tapping at the door—

"Who's there?" said a gruff voice.

"A poor tired child," answered Isabel, "who seeks a night's shelter."

"Don't let her in!" cried the shrill voice of a woman. "She's an impudent beggar girl, who was round here a month ago, and stole a wooden platter."

Isabel assured them this was false. "I never was here before, and will go away at daybreak," she pleaded. Getting no answer—"I have a piece of money," she said producing a small silver coin old Betty had given her.

"Money, eh?" said the female voice sharply,

and a dirty ill-favoured woman put out her head.

“ Give it me, and come in.”

The hut was a miserable squalid abode, the man and his wife boorish repulsive persons.

“ Here’s your victuals,” said the latter, producing some brawn, and black bread. “ And there’s your bed ”—throwing a sheep skin into one corner. She had lighted a rush candle, which made “ darkness visible.” “ Make haste and help yourself, its time we was a bed,” said the man shoving an old clasp knife towards the stranger.

Isabel found it impossible to take more than a few morsels of these coarse viands ; and the smell of the badly dried sheepskins, of which there were several, made the atmosphere of the place almost unbearable. The light was extinguished, and Isabel crept to her corner, with Fairy crouching beside her, and where, notwithstanding all discomforts she slept soundly till daybreak.

The noise of the woodman’s axe roused her, she started up, and declining to take any more of the unpalatable food, she set forth again on her

journey ; having vainly tried to get any intelligible direction from her host as to her route.

The morning was cloudy and overcast. Isabel soon got clear of the wood ; and after a time met a peasant going to his work. The man answered her civilly ; but his ideas of geography were not very clear. " Ye maun gang on till ye see a sheep track," he said, " and then ye'll come to a plain. Beyond, there is a bit o' a hill, wi' a heap of stones at top. Keep to the right of that, on till ye see a high crag—and that 'll lead ye straight to the sea. At least I believe so, for I very seldom go that way."

Isabel thanked the man, who added, " If its getting towards nightfall when ye reach the crag, better stop in the fisherman's village, till morning. The coast beyond is dangerous—so they say, and ye be but a bit lassie."

" Nay, I hope to get home before nightfall," said Isabel.

" A safe journey to you," said the man. " It looks dark overhead—there's a storm a-brewing."

Isabel went on, not feeling very certain that

she was going right ; only stopping to gather some fine blackberries, which a little assuaged the hunger she had for some time felt. A wide sandy plain now stretched before her. She crossed it, and looked for the hill—there were several hills. Which was the right?

Whilst pausing, the storm which had been for some time threatening burst forth, a torrent of rain fell, completely drenching the poor girl, who sought in vain for shelter. Fierce gusts of wind swept over the desolate country, hail and sleet almost blinded her, whilst the low roar of distant thunder increased her feelings of dreariness and alarm. There was nothing for it but to crouch down under a sheltering crag, and wait till the storm was less violent. The shades of evening fell, and Isabel, rising, made a desperate effort to proceed. The violence of the storm abated, though the rain still fell in torrents. To her great relief she after a while, heard, amidst the plashing of the rain, and the howling of the wind, the unmistakable sough and murmur of the sea, as its waves now rushed on to the shore,

now retired with a prolonged hissing sound over the shingle.

Isabel's heart gave a joyous bound, as she thought her troubles would now soon end. "Cheer up, Fairy," she said to the dog, which she had latterly been carrying in her arms, as the poor little creature was much frightened at the storm. "We shall soon be at home now!"

Pressing on with renewed vigour, another half-hour brought her to a narrow defile in the rocks, which led down to the sea shore. Isabel glanced around anxiously to see if she recognized any well known object, but the cliffs and shore seemed unfamiliar. The sea itself she hailed as a friend; yet the sight of it made her melancholy. When she last saw it, she was with her beloved mother and brother, and the ocean lay calm and bright under a sunny sky; now its waves rose and fell tempestuously, while above lowered the storm clouds, dark, lurid and awful.

After a time the moon rose, and by its rays Isabel could see for some distance along the shore. A broad sandy beach stretched away,

beneath a wall of rock, but she looked in vain for any trace of a fishing village.

"I must be far away from home," she soliloquized. "What am I to do? I see no prospect but that of remaining out here all night. Even Goody Blake's hut seems a palace to me now! God help me, I am very miserable!"

She sat down on a flat stone, and covered her face with her hands, while the little dog whined piteously, as if in sympathy.

"Come, Fairy, let us not despair, we will go on a little further."

She rose, and walked slowly, for her limbs were stiff, and her drenched garments hung heavily about her. Presently the rocky coastline made a sharp curve, rounding which, Isabel saw, with wondering eyes, standing on a steep but not high hill a short distance inland, the ruined towers and crumbling but majestic walls of an old castle, its outline showing dark and gloomy against the pale grey sky!

CHAPTER IX.

THE CASTLE.

WHATEVER her romantic ideas with regard to this old castle, Isabel would have greatly preferred the poorest cottage or humblest wayside inn, where she might have had the comforts of fire, food, and shelter. She was, however, thankful to have found some place of refuge ; she climbed up the hill, passed under the grand old gateway, and sank down upon a block of stone. The storm was over, and the moon shone fitfully through rifts in the dark clouds, bringing the outlines of Gothic arch and mullioned window into strong relief, and casting deep mysterious shadows on the broken stone pavement. Isabel, weary as she was, could not help admiring the wild, strange beauty of the scene. Soon the

mournful sighing of the night wind amongst the desolate ruins recalled her thoughts to her own forlorn situation ; and she resolved to explore the place further, hoping to find a warmer corner to pass the night in. Scarcely any portion of roof remained, so that it was difficult to find a sheltered nook, but at last, selecting a place where two walls formed an angle, she decided to stay there till morning.

But cold and hunger made sleep impossible, and after about an hour she again rose, and wandered among the ruins. The moon now poured a flood of silvery light on all around, and presently, happening to turn her eyes on the ground, her attention was attracted by a small bright object, glistening like gold amongst the crumbling stones. A sudden impulse led her to stoop down and examine what proved to be a small brass ring, fixed in a block of wood. Isabel pulled at the ring, and to her extreme surprise raised a trap door, and disclosed a flight of subterranean steps.

Here was a discovery ! Isabel had often said

and thought she should enjoy exploring the old ruin, but now all the stories she had heard about the castle and its dangers rushed into her mind. She dismissed them, however, as idle tales. It would be such a triumph to descend into the recesses of the old place, and disprove the accounts of its being haunted.

The moonlight streamed down the opening ; she could see to the bottom of the stone steps. She cautiously descended about twenty stairs, when her progress was impeded by an iron door. It yielded to slight pressure, and swung open noiselessly. Feeling her way, she went along a low narrow passage. Her breathing became oppressed by the close, damp air, and she felt an indistinct sensation of fear.

“How foolish I am,” she said to herself ; “what good can I get by going on ? I will go back at once. Come, Fairy.”

She turned to retrace her steps, when a confused murmur reached her ears, in which was blended the sound of human voices. She started and trembled. Fairy also heard it, for he pressed

close to his mistress, uttering a low warning growl. Then a doubt occurred to the young girl whether she was acting wisely.

“Why should I be afraid of my fellow creatures,” she thought. “Whoever these people may be, they would scarcely harm a defenceless child? And they might be kind, and give me some food. They may be travellers like myself, who overtaken by the storm and the night, have made their way in here.”

So she advanced more boldly, and before long saw a light glimmering at some distance. A moment more, and she came to another flight of steps. They were steep and uneven, but Isabel, sure footed and cautious, went down safely. The light as she now perceived, shone through the opening of a door which stood ajar. Loud voices and frequent bursts of laughter met her ear, and venturing to peep in, she saw the interior of a large, low roofed cave, in the centre of which a party of ruffianly-looking men were sitting round a table, with a smoking dish of savoury viands before them, and a plentiful supply of

various kinds of liquors. The smell of the food was tantalizing to the poor, half-fainting wanderer, who stood gazing outside, while Fairy showed unmistakeable signs of interest and excitement.

The dungeon was lighted by pine torches which cast a red lurid glare around. To Isabel the scene looked almost unearthly ; and she shuddered as the conviction forced itself upon her that these men were all robbers, perhaps murderers, for they carried pistols and short daggers in their belts, while swords and muskets lay near.

In one corner of the cave stood a large number of casks, in another were piled a quantity of miscellaneous articles half covered with sailcloth, amongst which Isabel saw the glimmer of gold and silver cups and salvers, and chests which looked suspiciously like plate-chests. In the chimney corner sat, or rather crouched, a hideous old woman, warming her lean shrivelled hands at the blaze. She was extremely dirty, her wild grey hair streamed over her shoulders, which her tattered garments scarcely covered ; while her

whole aspect was haggard and forbidding in the last degree. , She appeared to be the only female of the party.

Isabel heard the men talking over their different exploits, with great apparent satisfaction. She gathered from their conversation that the captain of the gang, and several of his men, had just returned from a smuggling expedition ; for they talked of their boat, spirits, and contraband goods.

“ Well, captain,” said one of the men, who seemed the next in authority, and who, Isabel observed, had a black beard and large scar on his forehead, “ you and your party have been successful ; but have not we fellows done pretty well in your absence ?”

“ That you have, my brave comrades,” answered the captain with an oath.

“ There have been an uncommon number of fires about lately,” observed another of the men.

“ Aye, those fires are capital things for us,” threw in a third.

"Yes," said the captain, "especially that one where you got——" Here he lowered his voice, so that the rest of the sentence was inaudible to Isabel.

Presently the man with the black beard said—

"We must be careful to keep up the terrors of the castle; so long as we do that we have a safe hiding-place here, and this has been a good retreat for men of our calling these fifty years. I shall have to do a little in the white sheet and blue fire line again, before long. Nothing scares the rustics or the coast guard either, like a good ghost or two!"

"I don't suppose the excise would care much for goblins if they once got on our track," said a man who had not spoken yet, but sat silently quaffing glass after glass of rum and water. He had a fox-like face with small blood-shot eyes, and hair of fiery red, and was, Isabel thought, the most repulsive-looking of all the robbers.

"You are always croaking, Lawless," said one of his companions. "You are half a coward at heart I do believe."

A fierce scowl and a muttered oath was the only answer to this taunt.

Isabel, who had stood listening and gazing, fascinated as it were, in spite of herself, now began to be very much afraid that Fairy would bark, and that she should be discovered ; for the more she heard and saw of these men, the greater horror and aversion she felt for them. She had determined that she would rather die than venture amongst such a wicked set, so she resolved to depart as quickly as she had come, regain her former place of shelter amidst the ruins, and leave the castle at day-break. The faithful little dog seemed to understand her feelings, and creeping close to her side kept perfectly still and silent. Just as she was beginning to stir, the captain said, addressing the black-bearded robber—

“ Wildman, are you sure you made everything secure—the middle door—the spring to the trap-door ?”

“ To be sure,” answered Wildman in thick stammering tones which showed that he was under the influence of liquor. “ They are all right

and tight but this one, which I'll lock in a minute."

"I shall go and see, for all that," said he of the fox-like countenance.

Isabel, greatly terrified, but still retaining her presence of mind, drew back behind the door, holding Fairy tight by the collar, hoping to escape observation. She listened breathlessly for the next word or movement. She heard the last speaker say—

"I think I shall take one drop more of this good liquor before I look round. I've had an uncommon hard day of it."

"Now," thought Isabel, "is the time for making my escape."

Catching up Fairy, she set off at full speed, and so great was the horror she felt at having been so nearly seen by the robbers, that she resolved, once out of this den of thieves, she would not pause until she had put at least a mile between herself and it; blaming herself for having allowed her curiosity to detain her so long. She flew along the passage, and up the steep uneven

stairs. She had just reached the top, when in her haste and nervousness she stumbled over a loose stone, and fell, rolling down the whole flight of steps.

Fortunately she was not seriously hurt, but the noise of her fall alarmed the robbers, and before she could regain her footing she felt herself roughly seized hold of, and dragged into the cave. Isabel was too much stupified by pain and terror to attempt any resistance, which would indeed have been useless, for she was held fast by a powerful man. The whole gang had risen, and fixed their gaze on her.

"In the name of all the fiends, what have we here?" cried the captain, who had grasped his pistol. "You careless fellow, this is your doing!" he added, glaring fiercely at Wildman, "I must stop your grog." Then, addressing Isabel, who stood trembling and half dead with fear, he said, "Tell me instantly how you came here?"

"I was caught in the storm," she replied, "when trying to find my way home, and sought shelter. I assure you my coming among you was

purely accidental, and I hope that you will let me go away at once."

"A likely thing, indeed!" said the captain. "No intruder who enters these walls ever goes out alive. Go away, indeed! No, no, not if I know it! We have most fortunately caught you, and you must remain our prisoner."

At these dreadful words poor Isabel threw herself upon her knees in an agony of grief and terror, exclaiming, "Oh, pray, for mercy's sake, let me go! I will never tell your secret. Indeed you may trust me. You cannot be so hard-hearted as to keep me here! Let me go, I entreat, I implore you!"

"You should not have come spying and prying about among us," said the robber chief, with a harsh laugh, "if you object to staying here so much. There is no help for it now. So leave off making this disturbance, and come and warm yourself at the fire."

Isabel, who saw she had no chance of escape at present, obeyed in sorrowful silence. She was glad to dry her wet clothes, and thankfully took

the food that was offered her, giving some to Fairy, who, stunned by the fall he had shared with his mistress, now limped in after her, and showed his anger at her captors by threatening growls.

“A dog, too!” sneered one of the robbers.

“It will be barking, and that will never do?”

“He will not bark,” said Isabel, eagerly.

“He will do just what I tell him.”

She had now the opportunity of taking a more minute survey of the interior of the cave.

The first object that attracted her attention was a young man, heavily fettered, and fastened by a chain to a massive iron ring in the wall. He was in the most remote corner of the cave, and his face and form were in shadow, but Isabel could see that he had a gentle expression of countenance, very unlike the wild ferocity of the robbers; that his long fair hair and beard were wild and dishevelled; that he was very thin, and his garments so old and worn that it was difficult to discern their hue or texture. His age might be about thirty, his air was sad and dejected, and

Isabel fancied that he cast a compassionate glance upon her.

The robbers, when they had finished their supper, threw their prisoner a few scraps of food, with cruel and insulting remarks on his idleness, ingratitude, and uselessness, mingled with complaints of the endless trouble he gave them. The young man sighed deeply, but made no answer. Meantime Fairy, who had refused to be friendly with the robbers, went up to the prisoner in a caressing manner, and began to lick his hands. Angry at this, Lawless seized the dog, beat it severely, and took it out of the room with him. Isabel remonstrated with tears, and begged that the dog might be left with her, but in vain.

All the party, except the captain, Wildman, and Lawless, soon departed for the night, leading the prisoner with them. As the latter passed near Isabel, he raised his downcast eyes, saying—

“ Ah, poor child, you little know what you will have to suffer, if, like me, you are kept a prisoner here ! ”

At this the robber who was conducting him struck the unfortunate young man a sharp blow, and compelled him to proceed.

Isabel involuntarily screamed at the sight of this barbarity. The captain looked sternly at her, then made a sign to the old woman, who forthwith took her into a long narrow passage leading from the farthest end of the cave, on each side of which low doors opened into small cells. The old woman ushered Isabel into one of these, a miserable damp place, with nothing in it but a heap of straw in one corner. She then departed, leaving the girl alone in the dark, and locking the door upon her.

CHAPTER X.

THE ROBBERS' PLANS.

ALONE in the cell, Isabel at first felt too bewildered and wretched even to pray. She tried to bear in mind that her Heavenly Father could see her, and hear her cries, even in these gloomy depths, and that he has promised to watch over prisoners and captives. Throwing herself on her wretched bed, she lay for some time, reflecting on the strangeness of her situation.

In her blythe happy days she had wished that some little romantic incident might occur to her in connection with the castle, but that she should find a living grave within it was dreadful. "I surely shall—I *must* escape!" she said to herself.

Presently she heard the three smugglers who remained in the large apartment talking together,

and knew from the situation of her cell that she was only separated from them by a wall. She could catch a word or two, but those words made her anxious to hear more. Seeing a very small aperture, scarcely more than a chink in the wall, she rose softly, and crept noiselessly along, and crouching down looked through the crevice.

The three men were seated round the fire, talking earnestly.

"Well, Captain," Isabel heard the one called Wildman say, "and what would you do with the child?"

"Why, comrade," said the Captain, "although I have taken away lives in my time, I own it goes against me to kill her, she is so young and harmless."

"Pooh, nonsense," threw in Lawless, "she seems a sharp little thing, and if she escapes, could inform against us as well as the strongest man."

"I never killed but one young one," resumed the captain, lowering his voice, "and that was some five and twenty years ago, when I was

but a young fellow myself—the son of that old miller, who died so hard, and whose bank notes nearly got us into trouble. His dying eyes haunt me even now.”

“Nonsense, Captain, don’t be stupid!” said Lawless with a harsh laugh.

“And will haunt me on my dying bed—to my dying day, rather,” continued the chief, not heeding him.

“Well mended,” said the other, “for you will never die in your bed, you know, Captain! Suppose the little wretch escapes?”

“We can keep her a close prisoner,” said Wildman, who appeared less ferocious and cruel than his companion.

“Very well,” returned the Captain, “let it be so. Of course if we find her making attempts to escape she must not be allowed to live. But she is young, and will get reconciled. Mother Crab is growing old and will soon be of no use. The girl might take her place in time.”

“As to that other prisoner, the Lieutenant as we call him,” said Lawless, “I own I cannot see

the use of keeping him alive any longer. I thought it would be fun to torment him, and have our revenge, but upon my soul, I am getting tired of the sight of his doleful phiz. I had almost rather draw the water up myself, for that is the only use he is."

"Poor wretch, it would be a charity to put him out of his misery," said Wildman, with a shade of compassion in his voice. "He might have been one of us, and as jolly as a cricket; but he would not. Now we have a girl, we certainly do not want two prisoners to look after."

"Of course not!" cried Lawless eagerly. "Let him be quietly put out of the way the week after next, when we go on our grand expedition. A thirty pound shot round his neck, and a plunge into the deep will do his business."

"Yes, quickly and painlessly," said Wildman. "Come Captain, you consent?"

"I do," said the chief. "It will be a relief to get rid of him. The 29th is our day."

A murmur of satisfaction from the other two, then followed some talk on matters of no interest

to the trembling listener ; and very soon the steps of the men were heard in the passage, a closing of doors, and all was still.

Isabel remained motionless—stupified with grief and horror. Then, covering her face with her hands, she burst into an agony of tears and lamentations.

“Oh, why did I ever come near this fatal castle,” she cried, sobbing, “or why did I venture down those steps.”

“When I fell from the pony and hurt my ankle, and when I had the fever afterwards, I thought I could not be more unhappy ; but then I was free, and had a kind friend, with the prospect of being able in time to reach my home again ; but now I am among smugglers, and murderers, a prisoner in a miserable dungeon ! I am sure the robbers will not let me go, even if they do not kill me, and I shall never see my dear mother or Arthur, or any of my friends again !”

She was not too absorbed by sorrow for herself, to feel deeply for the male prisoner, her fellow sufferer. His position was even worse

than her own ; he was doomed to death—the very day fixed ! Her life, at least, was to be spared for the present. That was something. Isabel possessed, fortunately for her, one of those happy temperaments that always looks at the brightest side of things ; she came of a good race, not easily daunted by difficulty or danger. Surely in time she should be able to escape ; and, Oh ! happiness—might she not find a way to assist the other prisoner also ?

The poor girl was so completely worn out both in mind and body, that — notwithstanding the horrors of her situation, and the discomforts of her cold hard bed—she in the midst of these reflections, happily fell asleep.

CHAPTER XL.

LIFE IN A DUNGEON.

ISABEL was roused very early the next morning by the harsh tones of Dame Crab's voice, telling her to get up and follow her.

She obeyed—what would it avail to do otherwise?—and the old woman led her into the large room, which the robbers called the Cave. Here she found the whole party assembled, engaged in a variety of ways, some cleaning and loading their firearms, while others were examining the numerous articles that lay piled together in a corner.

As Isabel entered, she heard the Captain say, as if in answer to some question or remark from one of the men, "After our next expedition we will divide all the booty, not before. There will be

a good round sum in gold pieces to add to it then. Meantime, let all these articles be carried into the strong cell, and locked up."

This order was obeyed, the men saying exultingly, "What a glorious time that will be! Shan't we live like fighting cocks then! There have not been such prizes for years."

As soon as the Captain perceived Isabel, he produced a long chain, one end of which he fastened to a strong iron ring in the wall, while the other he prepared to fix, by means of a heavy padlock, round the girl's waist. Isabel violently resisted this treatment, but all she got was a blow from one of the robbers which nearly knocked her down. At the same instant a voice called out "Shame!" and looking up Isabel saw that it proceeded from the prisoner, who was chained to the wall in the same manner as on the preceding day.

"Silence!" cried the Captain, presenting his pistol.

"Fire, if you will," said the young man, calmly. "Death would be welcome to me."

"No, no," said the captain, laying down his weapon. "The time for your death is not come yet, my fine fellow. You will die exactly when I please!"

Isabel thought that she should only draw down more cruelty either on herself or her fellow prisoner by further resistance, so was silent; she remained standing with her face to the wall, crying bitterly.

She believed that all chance of escape was now taken away. She refused the food that was offered her, and chafed at her captivity like a wild bird that has suddenly been taken from open fields and woods, to pine in a dark, dreary cage.

The men, having finished their meal of cold meat and strong ale, surrounded the Captain to receive orders for the day. The robbers were obliged to use the greatest precautions to prevent their hiding place from being discovered. Not one of the men was allowed, on any pretence whatever, to go out or come in at the trap door, except before sunrise and after sunset. The small brass ring which had in the first instance

attracted Isabel's curiosity was never visible in the day time; the men always covering it and the trapdoor to which it was attached, most carefully with stones and rubbish.

The Captain soon dismissed all the men except two; his commands being given, and the replies made, in language so mixed with slang expressions, and a dialect peculiar to themselves, that a great deal was unintelligible to Isabel. Not that she cared to listen much, though she felt a certain amount of curiosity as to the daily occupations of these men. It appeared, as far as she could gather, that they carried on at least a pretence of different honest callings, though such were subservient to their real profession as thieves and smugglers. One man would personate a pedlar; another, as a travelling locksmith, would obtain access to respectable houses; and many and daring were the robberies committed under cover of these and other disguises; while there was not a fair or market held for miles round but was attended by one or more of the robbers in different characters.

The Captain told the whole party to be back soon after dark, charging them, if they valued liberty—life itself—to leave everything safe. Such an act of carelessness as that of the past night had endangered the whole community.

“That cunning young wench there,” he added, scowling at Isabel, “very nearly gave us the slip last night, without our being any the wiser, but we have got her safe enough now.”

The Captain then consulted with Wildman and Lawless about the time and place for conveying a large quantity of smuggled spirits to a customer at a distance, in their boat, which, to avoid suspicion, was kept in a small harbour a mile off.

When the men were gone, the old woman, whom the robbers called Dame Crab, on account of her sour temper and hobbling gait, brought out a quantity of fishing nets, which the Captain had told her to mend, for one of the robbers' employments was fishing. Dame Crab, Isabel had observed, was very deaf and excessively cross, and did not appear to have more humane feelings than her male companions. The nets wanted a

great deal of mending, and the old woman, whose sight was bad, grumbled very much, and looked more than usually ill-tempered. At last, after some ineffectual attempts, she threw all the nets down in a passion, and began to cry and stamp with her foot, saying that she was sure the Captain would beat her black and blue when he came home, if the nets were not done. Isabel, who was of a forgiving temper, and who could not bear to see anybody in distress, was moved at the old woman's trouble. She considered that Dame Crab's ill temper and want of feeling were probably occasioned, or at any rate increased, by old age and ill-usage, and thinking almost any occupation preferable to being idle, offered her assistance. Dame Crab at first took no notice of her, but on Isabel's repeating her proposal, she rudely pushed the nets within the girl's reach, and sat down in a sulky manner on a low three legged stool in the chimney corner. This was her favourite place, although there was not a spark of fire, the robbers not daring to run the risk of allowing smoke to issue from the narrow

winding fissure that formed the chimney, in the day time; lest that sign of life should betray them.

Isabel, with much patience, set about disentangling and repairing the nets, which was no easy task; however, she at length succeeded in putting them into tolerable order. She then called to Dame Crab, and showed her the nets, at the sight of which the old woman's rigid features wreathed into the nearest approach to a smile of which they were capable, and she said in a low confidential tone to Isabel—

“If I was sure you would let me chain you up again before the Captain comes home, I might let you loose to help me a bit, as you seem a handy clever girl, and I am getting old, and have lots of hard work to do.”

Glad to be free on any terms, Isabel promised to let Dame Crab fasten her chains on again when she chose, and the old woman brought out a bunch of old rusty keys.

“It is lucky,” she muttered, as she fumbled amongst them to find the one she wanted, “that

the Captain left these keys with me to-day. They unfasten every lock in the place except the outer doors. It is very seldom as he trusts the lot out of his own keeping in the day time, but he forgot them to-day, he was so taken up with his affairs. But come," she added, snappishly, her habitual ill-humour settling down upon her like a cloud; "I didn't give you this nice treat for you to stand idle. You must first put everything in order here, and sweep the place up, and then get fuel for the fire, against we light it again, and then you must scour the large kettle ready to boil the men's supper, and then you can mend this cloak that is so torn. Look sharp about it, and then—but stop," she added, interrupting herself, "do all this first, and then I will tell you what is to be done next."

Isabel at first rejoiced in the prospect of being free for a time, thinking she might thus acquire valuable knowledge of the localities of her prison, and lay plans for escaping at some future period. She knew that there was no chance of this at present, for the robbers had left the doors tightly fastened; but she began again to entertain hopes

that she might not always be chained up, and she resolved to appear as if she had no wish to escape, hoping by that means to put them off their guard. But Dame Crab gave her so much to do, and watched her so closely, that she had not a moment's peace. At last, however, the old woman quitted the cave, and Isabel took the opportunity of addressing the prisoner, who sat, his face covered with his hands, in an attitude of hopeless despair.

"I am very sorry, sir," she said timidly, "that you should have brought ill-usage on yourself by speaking kindly to me!"

"Never mind that," said the young man, looking up. "I have been a prisoner long enough to pity a fellow sufferer."

"How long have you been among these cruel men?"

"Nearly two years, and here I shall die, for I have no hope of ever being set free, except by death."

"And how did you come here?" asked Isabel.

"I will tell you as briefly as I can," answered

her companion. "I am an officer in the royal navy, who, after the English fleet was routed at Malaga, in the disastrous expedition of which you have doubtless heard; entered foreign service, as did many others. Family and political reasons combined to alienate me from my own country; I led an adventurous life, rose in rank and fortune, sometimes fighting pirates, at others commanding a merchant ship. It was while engaged in the last more peaceful service, that sailing as captain of a schooner from India to a French port, the vessel encountered heavy gales in the Channel, and was greatly damaged. My men, who were an unruly set, took the opportunity to mutiny; they overpowered my chief officer and myself, intending to run the vessel into an English port, and seize her rich cargo. But being ignorant of navigation, they let the ship strike upon some rocks, where, as she lay at the mercy of the winds and tides, she was seen and boarded by these smugglers. My crew, who had released the mate and me, terrified at the danger of shipwreck, now escaped to the boats, which

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were speedily swamped, my officer was shot dead by my side, and I, after a desperate resistance, was overcome by numbers and brought here. Impressed by the reckless daring I had shown, the robbers proposed to me to become one of their gang, said I should be second only to the captain in command—hence my nickname, given at first in respect, and continued in ridicule—of the ‘Lieutenant.’ I must, in case of joining, bind myself to them by the most solemn and terrible oaths. I refused, of course, on which, irritated and disappointed beyond measure, they swore that I should linger out the rest of my existence in this miserable dungeon. You may imagine my horror, my despair, thus buried alive in the prime of my days.”

He paused abruptly. Isabel, much affected, said—

“Do not despair, the robbers may relent, and take pity on you. Or some fortunate circumstance—”

“No,” interrupted the prisoner, in a tone of calm despair, more touching than the most

violent grief. "No, that will never be. But I have told you my history, let me hear by what strange accident you became an inmate of this dismal place?"

Isabel told him in a few words, and ended by repeating the conversation she had overheard the preceding night, so far as it related to herself. She had scarcely finished, when Dame Crab came in, with scowling brow, threatening to tell the Captain if she ever found her speaking to the prisoner again.

CHAPTER XII.

DESPAIR.

PRESENTLY Dame Crab came to Isabel, saying that the men would soon be home, and desired her to have her chains put on again directly. Soon afterwards the Captain and several of his followers entered, the rest of the gang dropping in one by one.

The Captain enquired as to the success of each, and then asked what there was for supper. On this appeared, as if by magic, a large stock of provisions—a couple of fat pullets, a duck, a goose, several joints of meat, a piece of bacon, eggs, and vegetables. Most of these were thrown into the great pot to boil; some relishing morsels were spitted, and set down to roast.

Whilst they were at supper, the men talked

over their adventures, and boasted of their exploits. The Captain announced gravely that the expedition before referred to must be delayed for some time. This seemed to cause some dissatisfaction, but the Captain was a little king amongst the rest, and always had his way.

Isabel, who had eaten nothing all day, was very hungry, and the smell of the nice food was tantalizing; but the robbers took no notice of her or the other prisoner until they had finished their own meal, and then only threw them some scraps of food, Isabel reserving half of her share, in the hope of being able to give it to poor Fairy.

Dame Crab was desired to lead the girl to her cell, and was about to do so, when the little dog, which had been locked up in some remote part of the underground domain, contrived to escape, and ran with joyful barks to his young mistress, who took the faithful little animal in her arms and caressed it. Lawless, who had been irritated by the dog the preceding night, tried to snatch it away from Isabel; and on her resisting was going to strike her, when, quick as lightning, Fairy

sprung up and seized the robber's uplifted arm. Roaring out with the pain of the bite, Lawless demanded that the dog should be killed instantly, but this the Captain objected to; he disliked seeing life taken away, and had once a favourite dog; but he told Lawless he might carry off the animal next day, and "do what he liked with it!"

"You may keep the little cur till to-morrow," said the Captain to Isabel. "Do not stand begging and praying, girl," he added. "My word is law here, as you will find."

So saying, he pushed her into the cell, and locked the door.

"Poor little thing, you do not know your intended fate," said Isabel to Fairy, as she fed him with the scraps of meat, and lay sorrowfully and tearfully down on her hard couch.

The next morning she was brought out, and chained up as before. She purposely left the dog in her cell, hoping he might be forgotten, but directly after breakfast, Lawless whistled him out, and silencing his cries with a blow, carried him off.

The loss of this faithful creature, which had been the companion of all her wanderings and adventures, was a great grief to Isabel; particularly when she reflected that he was to be killed merely for showing his attachment to her.

Dame Crab, who found Isabel very useful, always made some excuse for keeping the keys when the robbers went out, that she might privately unlock the girl's chain. She gave Isabel so much to do, and used her so cruelly, that the poor child led a life of slavery and bondage.

As may be easily supposed, Isabel took advantage of her temporary freedom to explore every nook and recess of the subterranean dwelling place.

At the farther end of the long passage was a wide arched vault, in which ammunition and other stores were kept. In the centre there was a well of great depth, with a never failing supply of cold sparkling water. It was drawn up by a bucket and windlass, and the prisoner was made to draw a sufficient daily supply every morning before the men's departure.

One instance of the old woman's petty tyranny, was taking care that Isabel should never be left alone with the other prisoner; she had rightly divined that it would be a great pleasure and consolation to both to converse together, and she was determined that neither should have that solace. Although apparently very deaf, Dame Crab seemed to know as if by intuition whenever either of them attempted to break her commands of never speaking, which Isabel at first frequently did.

The young man was so broken in spirits and in health, that he took little notice of anything, and seldom or never addressed Isabel; he would give her perhaps one kind glance in the course of the day, and would follow her languidly with his eyes as she went about her work—but this was all.

The pair thus strangely thrown together were naturally drawn to each other by feelings of sympathy, although they knew not even one another's names; they were severally distinguished by the titles of "child" and "lieutenant,"

unless when Wildman, who was the least surly of the smugglers, would address Isabel by the appellation of "kitty," or "little kitten."

It may here be remarked, that rough and rude as these men were, there was something in Isabel's youth and innocence that inspired a certain respect, so that no insult was ever offered her during her stay amongst them; and although she got cross words and scoldings at times, no one, after the first day, attempted to strike or hurt her. Dame Crab was the sole exception, indeed, from first to last, she was the poor girl's chief tormentor.

One day, about a week after Isabel's first coming to the castle, the Captain returned before Dame Crab has fastened Isabel's chains on again, which threw the old woman into violent agitation. She ran screaming away, uttering such hideous noises that Isabel thought if the dame was condemned as a witch it were no wonder; whilst Isabel was, as a punishment, shut up in her cell, without any supper.

Next morning, however, the Captain's anger

seemed to have subsided, for as Isabel entered she heard him say to the old woman—

“Now I know how it is that my orders have been so much better executed of late, so I don’t care if the child is let to have her liberty whilst we are out, as we always lock the doors and take the keys. But you are a sly old cat, all the same, and deserve a good beating, you do !”

This order, relating to herself, caused Isabel but little gratification. She would, she thought, have to work harder than ever ; she had now almost given up all hope of escape, and was fast sinking into the depths of wretchedness and despondency.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FORLORN HOPE.

DAY after day passed, following each other in sad monotony, until Isabel almost lost count of time. Winter had set in, and she often suffered from cold, as well as from hunger. Dame Crab, whose appetite seemed insatiable, would pounce on all the food left by the robbers, and either devour it at once, or set it aside for her own use. The poor girl's health began to be affected by the want of sufficient nourishment and fresh air.

It was, as nearly as she could calculate, rather more than two months since her arrival at the castle, when she awoke very early one morning, feeling more than usually unhappy, for the night before, she had learned that the important expedition, which for some reason or other had been

postponed over and over again, was really to take place in two days' time. The captain had been reminded by the two next in authority that the Lieutenant's death was decided upon, and had replied with an oath that he had not forgotten.

Only two days! Could nothing be done?

Presently she heard some of the men moving in the cave, and heard the captain complain that he had lost the master-key, with which he could unfasten every lock in the place. It suddenly struck Isabel that the keys which unlocked the inner and middle doors, had latterly been hung up at night on a very high nail in the wall above the fire place, and that if she could get possession of these keys she might make her escape. She also remembered that one of the large bunch of keys which usually hung at night in the same place, would unlock the other prisoner's chains. So might she not be able to set him free also?

These thoughts revived her drooping spirits, but on more mature reflection there appeared many almost insurmountable difficulties. In the

first place the robbers always took the keys away with them, so she had no chance of getting them except at night; and then the Lieutenant was always unchained, and locked up in a cell. Still, she knew which one it was—what might not perservance and ingenuity accomplish? Perhaps she might be fortunate enough to find the master key, about which such an outcry was being made—find it, and secrete it! If the other poor prisoner's time was not so fearfully short! It was only within the last few days that the keys had been left in the cave, instead of being taken by the captain to his cell; but now the nights were long and dark, nocturnal expeditions were made, and the key wanted.

It was with more cheerfulness than she had felt since first coming to the castle that Isabel answered Dame Crab's summons to come and help get breakfast. The captain departed, grumbling about his key, and Isabel passed most of the day hunting for it, but in vain. She observed that Dame Crab usually quitted the cave for a few minutes shortly before the robbers

returned, to see that all was in order; and it was only in this brief period that Isabel dared speak to her fellow prisoner.

Impatient to communicate her hopes and plans to him, Isabel executed all Dame Crab's orders with so much alacrity and expedition, and with such comparative cheerfulness, that when she and the prisoner were for a few minutes left alone together, he opened the conversation—a very unusual thing for him to do, by saying :

“You must have indeed an enviable disposition, if you can be cheerful in this wretched place, without the slightest prospect of ever escaping from it!”

“Yes, but I assure you,” replied Isabel eagerly, “I have great hopes that we shall both escape!”

The young man shook his head, with a sad smile. “I cannot see how that can be,” he said. “You know how closely we are confined, and how watchful the robbers always are; I, in particular, am never unchained, except to be led backwards and forwards to my sleeping place;

which is always locked ; besides one of the robbers sleeps in the same cell with me. The half-hour during which I am every morning employed in letting down and winding up the bucket at the well, two or three of the men are always present. Nor have they once relaxed in vigilance during this long period.

“ I know well that they only keep me alive in order to have the brutal pleasure of gloating over my sufferings—because killing me would be the more merciful course ! No ; even though in time some happy chance may favour your escape—which I hope and pray—for me there is no release, but death ! ”

“ Oh, no, no, you must not say so ! ” cried Isabel with emotion. She told him her hopes connected with the keys ; adding “ Suppose I were to hamper the lock of my cell-door, Dame Crab would, most likely, to spare herself trouble, leave it unfastened. That would be one great point gained. Then if you could by any means induce the men to leave you here for a night—pretend to be lame, or suppose—”

"It seems to me that most of your plan rests upon suppositions," said the young man, with a faint smile.

"I recollect," pursued Isabel, "seeing one of the men wax a piece of cord with some bees wax, which he laid by on a shelf. A piece of that put in a lock would effectually hamper it."

Dame Crab's entrance put an end to further converse; but Isabel easily managed to obtain a small piece of wax, which she slipped into the keyhole of her door.

Gladly that night she obeyed the old woman's summons to retire. She entered her cell, heard Dame Crab close the door, and listened anxiously for what should follow.

The old dame put the key in the lock, which she was, of course, unable to turn. "Bother the lock," she muttered to herself, "there's summut the matter—I must call one of the men! But no, I shall get a scolding, and the girl will never know but what it's locked. So I'll let it take its chance."

Dame Crab returned to the cave, and Isabel

heard the captain say carelessly, "Well, Goody, have you locked her up tight?"

"Aye, to be sure," said the old woman, in a sulky tone.

Isabel was delighted with the success of her scheme. Her own course seemed tolerably clear. She could not yet see how the lieutenant's escape was to be managed, which grieved her much. She lay awake a long time thinking, but no expedient occurred to her. This greatly distressed her, but she recollected that she had overcome one obstacle, and was comforted.

Presently she heard Wildman say to the captain and Lawless, "We shall only have the trouble of locking up the lieutenant once more; we may as well save ourselves that bother, *the last night*, and leave him in the cave till we want him, as we are to start before daybreak."

Isabel was overjoyed at hearing this; she threw herself on her knees, and thanked the merciful God who had guided her through so many dangers, and who now, as she thought, had put it into her power not only to escape herself, but

also to be the means of saving the life of a fellow creature. In her ecstasy of delight, she almost forgot that she was still a prisoner, and that the greatest care and caution would be necessary to accomplish her dangerous undertaking. Her escape, and that of the lieutenant, must be deferred until within a few hours of the robbers' departure from the castle; their flight must be so timed as not to happen till the robbers were asleep, and yet before they began to make preparations for setting off.

The next day Isabel was hardly able to restrain her joy, she felt as if she must laugh aloud, or utter some wild exclamation; but she strove to appear as usual, lest she should excite suspicion.

In the evening, when Dame Crab went her rounds, Isabel said in a very low but joyful voice to the lieutenant—

“All is well so far. I have now settled in my own mind all about our escape from the castle.”

“What can you mean?” exclaimed her companion, in a tone of the greatest surprise.

Isabel explained in a few hurried words.

"Leave me in the cave?" said the young man. "Why? You have surely misunderstood."

Isabel shook her head.

"At any rate wait till after the smugglers are gone on this expedition. Half of the number will then be absent, and—"

"Oh, no!" cried the young girl, with trembling eagerness. "If you knew what I do—"

She stopped abruptly, but on being pressed by her companion, reluctantly told of his intended death. He listened calmly, then said—

"You are a kind-hearted, clever girl; but by trying to assist me, the danger, the risk of failure, is immensely increased. You might much more easily escape alone—go, and leave me to my fate."

"Not for the world!" cried Isabel. "How could I be so selfish, so heartless. Do but have courage, and trust to me, and I will answer for it all will go well. Dame Crab will be back in a moment—promise you will do as I ask?"

She clasped her hands in her earnestness, and fixed her eyes pleadingly on his face.

"Have you reflected seriously," he said, "on the cruelty, the vengeance you may draw down on yourself if you fail? For myself I care not, but for you, so young and tender—"

"I have thought of all," said Isabel gravely.
"*Promise!*"

Then, just as the old hag's steps were heard in the passage, he bowed his head, and answered, "I promise!"

With a bright smile Isabel withdrew swiftly to the farthest corner of the cave, where she busied herself with getting some platters and drinking horns ready for supper.

The men were home early, and as the outer doors were obliged to be kept open for some time, for the conveyance of spirit casks to the smugglers' vessel, the ever watchful captain ordered Isabel to be chained up till they were shut; a proceeding which the girl thought it best to submit to with apparent unconcern, thus gaining a word of praise from the captain.

All the party seemed in unusual good humour. Roast geese and turkeys were placed on the board, and both prisoners helped to a liberal supply. Isabel was too excited to take more than a few morsels. Her heart throbbed so, that she fancied it must be audible. Spirits were offered to both, but, as usual, declined. Isabel made various excuses to prolong her stay in the cave. At length Wildman, rising, said to the Lieutenant, "Well, my man, it's a pity you won't be jolly; but you are going a jaunt with us, and may stay here till we start, if you like. I am going to get a few hours' rest. *I* have to work for my living—I am not a lazy dog like you, you see!"

This wretched attempt at wit was received with a shout of laughter by the rest, who then dispersed to snatch a short period of repose before setting out on their expedition.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAP DOOR.

THAT night Isabel did not think of going to sleep. She lay, listening intently, until the echo of the last footstep died away; then waited for about half an hour, when she gave three very low but distinct taps on the wall. This was a signal agreed upon between herself and the other prisoner. He was to make no answer until he thought it time to commence operations. Impatiently she waited, her breathing almost suspended, about twenty minutes longer, which seemed an age; and repeated her signal. Presently three light taps answered her own. She sprung up instantly and passed into the cave. "It would have been madness to make an attempt sooner;" said the Lieutenant in a low whisper.

"True," answered Isabel, in the same cautious tone. "I must first get the keys."

This was not easy, for the nail on which they hung was so high that to reach it she was obliged to drag up a heavy form, and place on it a small three legged stool, from which she slipped and nearly fell, making some little noise. After a breathless pause, dreading lest the robbers had heard, Isabel's first care was to select the key that unlocked the Lieutenant's chains—what joy to see him free!—the next to select the key of the first door. They crossed the wide floor of the cave with noiseless steps, the Lieutenant carrying a torch. Isabel easily opened the door, as she had often seen the robbers do; and they passed through it, closing it carefully, though not staying to lock it again.

"Quick, do not wait," whispered Isabel to her companion. "Mind these uneven stairs. Be careful," she added observing with pain how weak and cramped his limbs seemed, from long imprisonment. "Now we are safe at the top—that is well. How dark this passage is!"

“Take my hand,” said the Lieutenant, whose natural courage, added to the hope of liberty, enabled him in a great measure to struggle successfully against physical weakness, and to whisper a few words of encouragement to the child who trembled by his side, brave as she was.

“This must be the iron door,” said Isabel, recovering herself ; and straining her eyes, through the darkness, which the torch but partially illumined. “Let me hold the torch whilst you unfasten it. I have heard the men say the lock is hard to turn. This is the key.”

The Lieutenant took it, turned the lock with one powerful effort, and the massive iron door swung noiselessly back on its hinges.

The pair then ascended the last flight of steps, and arrived at the trap door. This opened by means of a spring—a very curious and complicated one ; of which fact the girl and her companion were not aware. Isabel had opened it from the outside, probably by chance, unless, as was still more likely, the robbers had left it unfastened.

On the present occasion the two fugitives tried in vain to undo the spring, but without success.

“Whatever shall we do?” whispered Isabel, in great alarm, at this new and unforeseen difficulty. The robbers will be coming out. Oh, how fearful!”

“Courage,” said her companion, kindly. “We have not been really long yet—although it seems an age. This spring must yield at last. I am trying it every way.”

Isabel stood by him on the stairs, trembling so much from agitation, that she could scarcely hold the torch. “It will be all right in a few moments, my dear child,” said her companion; his spirit rising with the difficulties of the situation.

Another five minutes of torturing suspense and the spring yielded to his persevering efforts; the trap door was thrown wide open, and a rush of fresh cool night air swept in—how different from the close, heated atmosphere of the dungeon! The draught extinguished the torch, but it was

no longer needed, for the night was clear and starlight. Isabel turned her face to the pale blue sky, glimmering with its myriad golden worlds; her heart throbbed wildly—she was free! She turned to her companion, who she concluded was sharing her emotions of joy and gratitude. But what was this? He had sunk down upon the last step, gasping painfully for breath! His face looked deadly pale in the moonlight. The first effect of the pure air, after his long confinement, instead of invigorating, had overpowered him, by the sudden contrast. Was he dying?—dying, when on the point of regaining his liberty? In unspeakable alarm, Isabel grasped his hand which felt icy cold, and asked what was the matter.

“It is but a momentary weakness,” he faltered, Go—fly, I conjure you—I will follow you shortly. Go at once.—”

“And leave you? Oh, no!”

She saw with joy that he was rallying.

“One moment—Yes, wait one moment more,” he said.

“Meanwhile,” said Isabel, “I will run back and fasten the iron door. It will not take me an instant. The robbers are sure to pursue us shortly. It will greatly add to our chance of safety.”

“In Heaven’s name, no!” cried her companion. Go on—forward—not back!”

But as he spoke Isabel darted down the steps; flew to the door—and was just taking the key from the lock—when she heard a step behind her, a smothered curse, and felt herself pulled violently back by her long hair! A hand was at the same time placed over her mouth, to prevent her from screaming, the iron door was swiftly pulled to and locked in the inside; she was borne along the passage, down the second flight of steps, and back again to the cave once more!

CHAPTER XV.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

THERE in the cave all was bustle and confusion, flashing lights, and a murmur of voices ; the robbers, roused from their slumbers, were hastening into the cave, with weapons in their hands, to resist the supposed attack. The Captain's voice was heard, calling the men to order. Lawless, who still held the terrified Isabel fast, had, it appeared, remembered he had not loaded his pistols, and had returned to the cave to do so. Perceiving that the outer door was open, he hastily alarmed Wildman. " And then," as he said, " creeping cautiously along in the dark, I perceived a glimmer of starlight, for the trap door was open, too ; and there was this infamous little wretch, stealing along like a

ghost—and in an instant more she would have given us the slip !”

“The trap door open !” roared the Captain, “A thousand curses on him who—But no, I saw myself that all was secure. Twice nearly lost through a girl — a wicked, artful little hussy !”

“I thought,” said Lawless, “that I heard her talking.”

“It must have been to herself then,” said Wildman, laughing. “You are too clever, *you* are ! But she must be kept chained up for the future, as we kept the Lieutenant, there, who sits asleep in his corner, in the midst of noise and bustle enough to wake the dead !”

Isabel had listened to all this conversation with the most intense anxiety. “Thank Heaven,” she said to herself, “*that* part of my plan has succeeded ! Before they have found out their mistake, he will have escaped !”

Isabel had taken the precaution to hang the Lieutenant’s cloak against the wall just in the place where he was always chained up ; hoping

that it might, for a short period, deceive the robbers, and give the prisoner and herself a longer time to get away.

“ Did you talk of keeping that little wretch ?” were the Captain’s next words, as the excitement began to calm down a little. “ No—I swear she shall not live a day longer ! She shall die with the Lieutenant—we have had enough and too much of them both ; come along men, we must not miss our appointment. But stop—I will first know how this witch—for I believe she is one !—contrived to trick us, and so nearly made her escape ?”

“ I will tell you what I did—all about it,” cried Isabel, hoping to give the Lieutenant time to get away.

“ Well,” said the Captain fixing a scrutinizing look upon her, “ in the first place, how did you get out of your cell ?”

“ I know,” said one of the smugglers, “ the key-hole of the door is full of wax ! It cannot have been locked to-night !”

“ Not locked !” cried the Captain. “ That

wretched old Crab must be in league. I'll have her killed too!"

"No," said Isabel, "she knew nothing—I hampered the lock."

"You did—and you got the keys," said the chief fiercely. "Men, bring both the wretches along. It is high time to start. But by all that's diabolical what is this!" he almost yelled.

"The Lieutenant is gone! He must have escaped! Girl! is this your doing? Fly, all of you, run after him, shoot him, kill him; we are undone if he escapes! But stop—only half of you shall go—the rest must keep guard—Lawless, take five of the men—take swords, pistols, muskets, shoot him like a dog—do not return till you have killed him! Scour the country, he cannot have got far, and he is in no running order!

"There are no boats near, except our own. Perhaps our comrades have seen and taken him already. But no, I will go myself; we will all go. Come with me, you fellows," he said to the remaining men—for Lawless had lost no

time in obeying his orders. He and the five he had selected had already started. "We shall get into mischief with that boat's cargo; but that can't be helped. All is nothing compared to destroying that villain! Smyth, tell those in the boat to stand out to sea, and do the best they can. Are you all ready?"

The eagerness with which the robbers made their preparations, the fierce looks of satisfaction and murmured rejoicing at this fresh order, showed how deadly was their enmity against their late prisoner, and augured ill for him.

A few seconds sufficed for their preparations. "Wildman," concluded the Captain, "kill that screaming brat, and then follow. Obey my orders, do you hear! And be sure you make every thing fast, when you quit the cave. I leave the keys to you."

As he said the last words he departed. Wildman then approached Isabel, who had fallen almost insensible on the floor, and seizing hold of her, said—"You heard the Captain's orders—if I had my way you should live; but he must be

obeyed; so come along," he continued, raising her from the ground.

"Save me, pray save me! Suffer me to escape!" cried Isabel, clasping her hands together, and looking in his face imploringly.

"Our Captain never gave me so hard a thing to do as killing you," muttered the robber to himself. "But I will summon up my courage—it must be done. The Captain would be likely enough to kill me, if I did not. So come, child," said he more sternly, placing Isabel against the wall. "Out of the way, old wretch!" he shouted to Dame Crab, who stood at the door of the cave, which opened into the inner passage. The old woman, however, took no notice of him; and the robber, retiring a few steps, drew forth his pistol, presented it, fired at Isabel, who instantly fell; threw down the pistol, and fled. Dame Crab, who had run screaming away at the report of the pistol, was too much frightened to come into the cave again for a good while. The robber fortunately had missed his aim, the bullet whizzed past Isabel, and entered the wall, but

grazed her arm in passing ; and she had fainted with the fright.

When she came to herself she looked around, unable for some minutes to recollect where she was. All that she had done and suffered within the last hour seemed like a dream. The sight of Dame Crab, however, soon restored her to herself. The old woman was sitting very composedly before the fire, in her favourite attitude, with her elbows on her knees, and her head resting on her hands. She stared with an expression of blank surprise at Isabel, when the latter got up, and with faltering steps, approached the fireplace.

"What's this?" muttered the hag. "I thought Wildman had shot you!"

Isabel answered by requesting the old woman's assistance in tying up her arm, which was wounded, and which now bled profusely, and was very painful ; but the old woman only shook her head, and doggedly resumed her former attitude. Isabel was therefore forced to tie up her arm herself, as well as she could.

The poor girl was now in greater distress than ever; she feared that she had now no chance of escaping.

All that day she was in the greatest anxiety; besides being feverish and ill from her wound, and the long and severe strain upon her nerves, she feared every moment that the robbers would come back and put her to death. They, however, did not return; the night passed, dragging its slow length along—the next day came. The pitiless Dame Crab woke Isabel very early—she had not long forgotten her pain and sorrow in sleep,—and set her to work as hard as ever.

“You are not dead yet,” muttered the old woman, “and till you are you shall work for me. Ha! ha! Mother Crab is not the lowest of the low, as the captain once called her; there is some one still lower, whom she can trample on! Dame Crab—ay, Mistress Crab—my lady Crab—why not? I like that—it is good—very good! Ha! ha! ha!”

Isabel was sorrowfully sweeping the cave, as the old woman had ordered her; so weak with

pain and want of sleep that she could scarcely stand; when quite in one corner, in a crevice of the floor, she found a small rusty key. Dame Crab happening to be out of the cave at the moment, she took a torch to examine it. In an instant it flashed across her mind that this was the "master key" which the captain had lost! She flew to the door, and to her great joy found that the key would turn the lock.

Glancing over her shoulder, she saw Dame Crab re-entering the cave. The old woman, observing the outer door open, uttered a scream of surprise and horror, and began hobbling towards Isabel as fast as her legs would carry her, crying—

"Stop, pretty dear, just stop one moment, my pretty dear!"

But Isabel, quick as lightning, the torch in one hand, and the skeleton key in the other, rushed out of the door and locked it after her. She had scarcely done so before the old hag threw her whole weight against the door, pulling frantically at the lock, with a despairing yell,

like that of some enraged wild beast baulked of its prey.

The young girl ran swiftly but cautiously up the uneven steps, found her way along the passage, unlocked the iron door, flew up the last flight of steps, and arrived, breathless, at the trap door. Here she stopped for one moment to recover herself; trembling as she recollected the difficulty she and the lieutenant had had with the spring. It had nearly foiled them—if it should foil her now! But no; this time, whether she had improved by practice, or whether chance favoured her, she hit upon the right turn, and felt the spring slip back and the trap door yield. She pushed it open, went out, closed it again, replaced the stones and rubbish, and extinguished her torch, which she had now no further occasion for, as the sun was just rising.

The weird old castle rose again before her, her heart gave a strange wild throb as she glanced hastily at it, and thought of all that had passed since she first stood within its walls.

Now she was free! She scarcely dared rejoice

yet, she could not feel safe ; but, oh ! it was something to see daylight again ! This flood of glorious light—it seemed to the newly escaped prisoner a type of life, liberty, hope, and joy !

CHAPTER XVI.

LIBERTY.

ISABEL only paused for one moment to ascertain by the position of the sun, which direction to take, then ran along by the sea shore as fast as she possibly could, glancing back nervously every now and then to see if she was pursued. So great was her horror of being again caught by the robbers, that it was not until completely tired and out of breath, that she at last slackened her pace. The castle was out of sight, that was encouraging, and a smooth sandy beach, which seemed to extend for a considerable distance, afforded an easy and pleasant footing. She hurried on till she felt sure she had put at least three miles between herself and her late prison;

and then sat down on one of the great stones that dotted the beach.

It was a calm winter's day, the white-crested waves gently rippled in shore, ebbing back with a soothing murmur. The air, laden with fresh salt breezes, was just cool enough to be invigorating. A sense of peace stole over the girl's heart, her spirits rose, and though too much absorbed by her immediate personal fears and anxieties to *think*, yet unconsciously to herself, nature's eternal beauty and glory calmed her, and gave her fresh courage.

On, on again, she dared not yet snatch more than the briefest rest; and the excitement of her mind prevented her from feeling hunger or fatigue for the time. The coast wound very much, so that she felt she must go over some of her ground twice; yet she thought it safest to keep by the sea, she was so terribly afraid of getting lost again; besides, she fancied (whether right or wrong) that the robbers would be more likely to search inland both for the Lieutenant and herself. The beach was lonely too, she had

only as yet met a woman and a boy returning from shrimping. Isabel had observed that they stared with evident surprise at her, and this attracted her attention to the disordered state of her dress. She was bareheaded; her clothes soiled and ragged, her arm bound up with a blood-stained handkerchief, and altogether she felt sure she must present a wild and singular appearance. "My mother will scarcely know me," she thought. "Oh, I wonder how soon I shall see her?"

At last, when quite exhausted, she arrived at a small fishing village, consisting merely of a few huts grouped together on the beach, with nets spread out to dry, a few old boats, and some sails lying about. The sight of these tokens of honest life, however humble, was pleasing to Isabel. She entered one of the huts, in which she saw a young woman with a child in her arms, and a little boy by her side, and timidly asked leave to stay there a while and rest. This was readily granted. Isabel sat down on a low stool, and the boy, a pretty little fellow, came and stood by her, putting his hand in hers.

"Poor little girl very tired, mammy," he said, with childish pity. "And her arm is hurt!"

"Perhaps you are hungry?" said the woman kindly. And she produced some barley-bread and a little dried fish; which, with a draught of water, were all the provisions, she had to offer; but Isabel was grateful enough for them, especially for the water. Her wounded arm was now very stiff and painful; and seeing how much she suffered, the fisherman's wife offered to fetch her mother who was "a bit of a leech."

An intelligent elderly woman soon appeared, who carefully dressed the wound, and applied some balsam, with a fresh bandage. Isabel thanked her gratefully; she declined staying the night, but was glad of an hour's rest. On enquiring the distance to Greystock, she was referred to a sailor, called old Daniel, for information, who said the town was "a matter of twenty-five miles distant."

Daniel Benson was a frank old seaman, with a pleasant, weather-beaten countenance. He told Isabel that he was going about six miles along the coast, in the direction of Greystock, and

would take her with him if she liked. Isabel gladly availed herself of this proposal, and again thanking the kind, simple people, got into the boat, and Benson rowed off.

Seeing that the young girl was sad and thoughtful, he presently asked kindly but respectfully what ailed her. Isabel replied by telling him some of her adventures, and saying that she was grieved to find she was still so far from her home. Without definitely mentioning the castle, she had begged the good people not to tell which way she had gone, in case any strange men enquired for her.

Old Daniel listened with much attention, resting a few minutes on his oars, but said nothing, only nodding his head.

The air was bleak and cold, and she was glad to wrap herself in an old coat which her companion lent her. The short winter day was waning fast, when the sailor said—

“This is the place where I leave my boat, whilst I go to sell my basket of fish in the neighbouring village. I wish with all my heart

I could take you further, but it will not do to disappoint my customers, you know."

"No, indeed," said Isabel; "I feel quite fresh again."

"Stop a moment," said Daniel thoughtfully. "If you should be in want of a supper and a night's rest, go to the White Cottage down on the sea beach, some good way further on, and tell them that you're a friend of old Dan'l Benson's. They are kinsfolk of mine—John Benson the man's name is; and they don't look down on me, though they're better oft in the world nor I be."

"Thank you kindly," said Isabel. "Farewell."

"Mind you take the pathway over the cliffs as I told you of," said Daniel, "by which you will cut oft a matter of three miles. It'll bring you out again by the sea all right enough."

Isabel was rather afraid of leaving the sea, but did as she was advised. The footway was lonely, she only met one or two peasants, and two boys with a donkey. She asked each person for the White Cottage, but no one seemed to

know it. It was now nearly dark, and Isabel, nervous as well as weary, longed to find some place of shelter for the night. One of the boys had told her that a mile inland she would find a little inn, the Saint George and Dragon, and she directed her steps towards it.

To Isabel's timid enquiry whether she could have a night's lodging, the landlord, a vulgar, red-nosed man, replied abruptly that if she had money to pay for it, she could.

Isabel stated her circumstances. "But," she added, "my mother, Mrs. St. Clair, will pay you."

"I don't take in tramps," said the man rudely. "Go along with you!"

Isabel crept away. It was now growing late, but the night was starlit. She looked wistfully at one or two houses, even knocked at the door of one, but was repulsed—told to go about her business. Discouraged and despairing of success, aware as she was of her strange and disreputable appearance, the poor girl once more turned her steps towards the sea shore.

She would make one last attempt to find the White Cottage, and if that failed, would seek some cave or crevice in the rocks, in which to lie down and sleep till morning—the robbers would not be likely to find her there.

Her head was beginning to wander through weakness, overfatigue, and long fasting. She felt a strange impulse to throw herself into the sea, when at last she caught sight of its lovely glassy surface, and heard its soft soothing lullaby. What was that about a sea of glass, and harpers with golden harps. Stay!—she must be losing her senses, or, dying! A sense of falling, a shock of cold, a rushing sound of many waters; and then a strong arm seemed to be lifting her aloft, and bearing her through the air! Then came a loss of all feeling, a lapse into darkness, and all life seemed at an end!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WHITE COTTAGE.

WHEN Isabel recovered consciousness, she was no longer by the sea shore, but lying on a low couch, in a room pervaded with a general sense of comfort and warmth, about which she saw two or three persons moving. Passing her hand across her eyes, she murmured something about the White Cottage.

"You are in the White Cottage," said a pleasant voice.

"Ah! I was looking out for it."

"In a very queer place," said another voice, gruff but kind. "You were a walking right into the sea, groping along like one in a dream. I had just stepped out to haul my boat a little

higher up on the beach, when I sees something unusual, and—”

“Indeed,” said Isabel, “it was very kind of you to save me. A sailor, Mr. Daniel Benson, told me to mention his name if—”

She was interrupted by a chorus of “Daniel Benson! Do you know him? Dear old Daniel!”

“Then you are Mr. John Benson?” said Isabel.

“Aye, my dear, and that’s my wife. Now tell us where you met old Daniel, and all about it?”

“Don’t make her talk at present, whilst she is so faint and weak, John,” said Mrs. Benson.

“You are right, mistress,” answered John. “And its all in good time, young lady, for we were just a going to have our suppers. I was not home till late.”

The two Bensons, also their daughter, a young girl, who had not yet spoken, seemed pleasant kindly people. Betty, as the daughter was called, soon prepared supper—some delicious broiled fish, with brown bread and ale.

Meantime the good wife took Isabel into an inner room, and invited her to change her wet and travel-stained clothes for a clean though coarse suit of Betty's, and all smiled good humouredly at her appearance, when she came forth in a stuff petticoat and loose jacket of serge, with a blue kerchief round her neck.

"Ah, now she looks a bonny lass," said John. "Not quite such a bouncing one as our Betty, who, though I say it, is as fine growed a gal as ever was seen in these parts."

Betty, who was indeed a good specimen of rural beauty, of the true Saxon type, blushed vividly, with a shy "Don't father!" and they all sat down to supper; the humble hosts vying with each other who should best serve their young guest; while Isabel revived like a tender plant brought out of the nipping frost into genial sunshine. She amused the simple folk by telling some of her adventures; but carefully avoided any mention of the castle.

"Well, you have seen a deal of life, to be sure," said Mr. Benson.

“Hasn’t she got beautiful hair, mother?” said Betty, admiringly, touching one lock with the point of her finger. “I should like to comb it and curl it.”

“It is very untidy now,” said Isabel, blushing in her turn, and pushing back the dark uncurled locks that fell round her like a cloud.

She began to be overpowered with sleep; almost before she had done her supper her eyelids closed, and she sunk back in the large armchair in which they had placed her—John’s own favourite seat. The mother and daughter undressed her tenderly, and the poor worn out girl was laid in a soft warm bed, a luxury which it was long since she had enjoyed.

The sun was high in the heavens before Isabel awoke. Her head was heavy and aching, and she would gladly have lain still a while longer, but for her great anxiety to continue her homeward journey. She looked round for her clothes, but saw no signs of any. Hearing her move, Mrs. Benson and Betsy came to her side, with kind looks and words.

"You must not be offended, my dear miss," said the former, "but we have been making a little common suit, just for you to wear till you get home. Your own things were mere rags, though I can see how nice they have been. We tried washing and mending them, but it wouldn't do."

"Mother had a bit of blue serge laid by," threw in Betty, "quite new, though coarse for one in your class, so we cut you out a little jacket; mine is so large for you."

"And I shortened one of Betty's Sunday skirts," pursued Mrs. Benson, "and if you do not mind wearing this grey woollen plaid—"

"Oh, how kind of you both!" exclaimed Isabel. "I am sure my mother will come and thank you, and be glad if you will come to see us. We live at Rock Cottage, not at St. Clair Hall now."

"St. Clair Hall!" said Mrs. Benson. "Why that is one of the grandest places in the county. I mind seeing it once. But why don't you live there now, miss?"

Isabel briefly told her the family history, then said, "I must get up now, it is so late."

She was, however, easily persuaded to have her breakfast before rising. There was still half an hour's work to be done to her dress.

When attired in her new suit, the jacket trimmed round the throat with a little linen ruff, the short full crimson petticoat, dark woollen stockings, and stout shoes, her costume was that worn by the yeomen's daughters in those days. For out of doors the plaid was arranged with much care, so as to cover both head and figure, falling in soft graceful folds.

She was eager to set off, but John, who had just come in, said she must stop and have a bit of dinner with them, after which a respectable farmer, named Timmins, who was going to Greystock, would take her with him to that town in his cart.

During dinner Betty begged Isabel to persuade Mrs. St. Clair to send for her to come and be her maid.

"I would be so devoted to you, and to your

lady mother, and your dear little brother," said the simple girl ; " and would save your good old housekeeper a great deal of trouble. Do let me come !"

Isabel said regretfully she feared they could not afford another domestic, though if ever the family was restored to its rights, she would certainly ask her mother to send for Betty.

John made Isabel take a shilling with her, in case she might want money, and the whole family escorted her to the St. George and Dragon Inn, whence Mr. Timmins was to start. Remembering the landlord's uncivil conduct, Isabel begged Mr. Benson to wait with her outside, but the exciseman insisted on going into the inn parlour with all his party, and calling for a pint of mulled sack, which the host, who knew and respected him, brought in himself. Isabel, uneasy at first, was satisfied on finding she was not recognized. She had begged her new friends not to say anything about her, either then or at a future period, as she had enemies, who might try to trace her out.

“But indeed,” she said, “I have done nothing wrong. Only trust me now, and at some future time I will tell you all.”

Mr. Timmins soon appeared, and in a few minutes more, Isabel was seated by his side, with a warm rug wrapped round her, and the yeoman’s high stepping horse bore them towards Greystock at the rate of ten miles an hour.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOME; YET HOMELESS!

THE air was clear and frosty, the ground crisp, a cheery winter's sun seemed determined to make the most of its short course through the heavens. Isabel's spirits rose, and she felt glad when her companion said as he drew up to a small inn, to wash his horse's mouth, and take a horn of ale—"We are now half way on our journey."

By-and-bye she began to recognise the landmarks; every turn of the road seemed familiar, each tree or cliff like an old friend.

At last the cart stopped in the High-street of Greystock; Mr. Timmins helped her down, and politely bade her good evening, while Isabel was in such a state of joyful excitement she could

scarcely find words to thank him, or to bid him adieu.

She hurried through the town, and so on by a footpath she knew well, to the little village beyond which Rock Cottage stood; turned the corner by the forge, crossed a field or two, reached the small enclosure which had been made into a garden, flew up to the house, and knocked impatiently at the door.

It was opened by a smart page, who in an offhand manner enquired what she wanted.

"I want your mistress, the lady of the house," said Isabel.

"Missis is at supper," replied the boy.

"I do not mind," said Isabel, trying to enter.

"Let me come in—your mistress is my mother!"

"My mistress has got no family," said the page. "She is a single lady."

"Where is Mrs. Pym?" cried Isabel. "Call her, she will know me."

"No such person lives here," said the page.

"I'm not to let in no strangers;" and he tried to shut the door in her face.

Isabel now lost all patience. She darted past the page, and made her way into the parlour. Here she found some six or eight persons seated at the supper table. Her eyes, dazzled for a moment by the sudden blaze of light, wandered eagerly round, but she saw no face she knew.

"Pray, what do you want here?" asked the lady at the head of the table, a tall, thin, middle-aged person, who struck Isabel as having a very sour and forbidding expression of countenance.

"My name," said the young girl, going up to her, "is Isabel St. Clair. I am the daughter of the lady to whom this house belonged a few months ago, and I am come here to seek her."

"I know nothing about her," was the cold answer. "You see I have company, you disturb us—pray go."

"If you please, madam," said the page, "that is a very impudent young person. She pushed past me, as rude as rude. She *would* come in."

"Conduct her out, pray, Thomas," said his mistress.

The guests, who had paused in their eating and

talking for a moment on Isabel's entrance, now stared at her superciliously, and the girl heard murmurs of "Impertinent intrusion," "Strange story," "Probably an impostor," from them all, with one exception. That exception was an elderly gentleman with a bald head and benevolent countenance, who, addressing the hostess, said—

"Nay, madam, do not dismiss this young lady—for such I perceive she is—so summarily! Pray, was the name of the lady of whom you bought this cottage, St. Clair?"

"Well, really, Mr. Freemantle," was the answer, in a drawling, indifferent tone, "I almost forget, but—I believe it was some such name."

"It is a noble and distinguished one, not easily forgotten," rejoined Isabel's advocate. "Can you recall any particulars about this lady, Miss Walters?"

"Yes," replied Miss Walters. "She seemed in much trouble about a child she had lost. She was in deep mourning, and had a little fair-haired boy with her."

"Oh!" exclaimed Isabel, greatly affected, "tell me where she is, I implore you."

"That I cannot, but I think she spoke of going to the Continent shortly. That was some six months ago."

"But if Mrs. St. Clair's daughter is dead," said Mr. Freemantle courteously to Isabel, "how is it that you are here? Pray explain."

Isabel told in few words the reason her mother had to consider her drowned. She gave a brief sketch of some of her adventures and her sufferings, since she was separated from her friends. As she concluded, her voice faltered; the feeling of bitter disappointment overpowered her, and she covered her face with her hands, unable to say more.

The appearance of truth which Isabel's story bore, her distress, and above all her speech and manners, which showed her to be a lady, notwithstanding her simple rustic garb, had evidently made a great change in her auditors' opinion of her. She was invited to sit down, and asked to tell more particulars of her story. The lady of

the house, as if to make amends for her ungracious reception of Isabel, pressed her to take some refreshment, but this the girl declined.

"You say you have come a long distance," said Mr. Freemantle. "You had better rest a little."

"You had better stay awhile," said several of the company.

"But where is she?" exclaimed Mr. Freemantle, in surprise, "She is gone. Let us call her back."

The kind old gentleman went himself to look for Isabel. He shortly returned with a disappointed air, saying "She is gone. I saw her running past the gate. I called to her, she waved her hand, but would not stop."

"It was her own choice," rejoined Miss Walters, stiffly. "I invited her to stay, I could do no more."

It was true that Isabel had gone. She could not bear to see a place where she had spent some of the happiest days of her life, and where every object reminded her of her mother, inhabited by

strangers. She ran for some time without thinking where she was going, but presently she stopped suddenly, for she remembered that it was time to seek some place of shelter for the night.

Not far from Rock Cottage was the humble dwelling of Molly Jenkyns' family. Molly might know something of Mrs. St. Clair's movements, Isabel thought, and accordingly bent her steps to the cottage. Great was the surprise of the woodman and his wife at the sight of her, as they believed her to be dead. Isabel learned that her mother had, almost immediately on her return, disposed of Rock Cottage; but where she was going to, the simple people did not know. Molly had taken the loss of the kind family, to whom she had become warmly attached, so much to heart, especially—as she supposed, the death of Isabel herself—that her parents had thought it advisable to send her to stay for a time with a married cousin at York. Molly would rejoice to hear the dear young lady was not dead.

“Give Miss St. Clair a night's lodging? To be sure they would. There was the little inner

room that Molly used to occupy, quite at her service.

A little pencil drawing of a pony was pinned to the wall. Isabel recognised it as Arthur's.

"Yes, poor dear, he gave it Molly," said the woman. "The girl asked your mother, miss, if she thought she should ever come back amongst us again."

"What did she say?" asked Isabel, eagerly.

She sighed deeply, and said, "No, never. She should go right off to foreign parts."

Mrs. Jenkyns got some porridge ready, which Isabel ate mechanically, and was glad to retire—to be at last free from the restraint of companionship—to be able, in the words of the Psalmist, "to commune with her own heart and be still."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HOLLOW OAK TREE.

ISABEL lay awake a long while, thinking, that night, in the solitude, and the stillness, and the darkness. A few hours ago she had believed that all her troubles and wanderings were about to end; but alas! she had met with nothing but disappointment. What should she do? How should she find her mother? She had no friends—no one to advise her. Her thoughts turned on her late fellow prisoner.

“He would help me, I am sure,” she said to herself, “for he is a gentleman, and kind hearted. But I do not know where he is—even if he is alive. I am ignorant even of his name, so how could I find him. Oh, what ever shall I do?”

Isabel’s former misfortunes, however, had taught her patience and fortitude.

"At least I am free," she soliloquized. "I have all the world before me, I will not despair. But a short time ago I should have said—never mind what happens so long as I can escape from that dungeon. Had I been in it an hour or two longer, probably the robbers would have put an end to my life. Now, thank God, I have life and liberty, health and strength; I am young, I will put my trust in my Heavenly Father, who has guided me through so many perils and difficulties, and will not forsake me now."

She prayed long and earnestly, and felt calmer and happier.

Finally she determined to go to Farmer Stockwell, who she thought was the most likely person to tell her something of her mother's plans. Though only a farmer, he was a sensible man, who had seen a good deal of life; and he had known and respected her father. Yes, she would start tomorrow for Wyke Farm.

Having come to this decision, Isabel fell asleep, and dreamed that she was walking with her mother and brother in London, and Fairy was of the party too—poor little lost Fairy!—and who

should join them but the Lieutenant! It was very agreeable, but she was not surprised. No one ever is, in dreams!

As soon as it was daylight she rose, and after a breakfast of bread and milk, thanked her humble hosts, and started once more on her wanderings. The weather was cold; the bleak winds of a northern spring swept over the desolate landscape, and Isabel shivered in spite of her warm plaid. She, however, kept resolutely on, in what she supposed to be the right direction, although after the first few miles she had no very decided recollection of the route. At about noon she was very glad to eat the slices of oaten bread and bacon, Mrs. Jenkyns had provided her with, and after a short rest proceeded on her way. But soon it began to snow, and the flakes fell thicker and thicker, until the young traveller could scarcely see a yard before her. She kept blindly on, feeling uncertain whether she was going right or wrong, but hoping that she might find some place of shelter, or meet with some human being to direct her. But night closed in, and she was still in the same forlorn situation.

The snow still kept falling in soft feathery flakes, the air was dense and heavy with it, and at last it lay so thick on the ground that at every step she sank in up to her knees. Weary and exhausted, the poor girl became so sleepy that she was several times on the point of lying down to rest just where she was. But she remembered to have heard of travellers being frozen to death through falling asleep in the snow, and resisted the impulse. At last, perceiving an old hollow oak tree, she crept into it, rejoicing in the welcome shelter.

She would remain there until it ceased snowing, and then go on by moonlight; the moon would rise presently, and she would be able to see her way better; meanwhile she made a firm resolution to keep awake. Aware that she was growing sleepy, she began to repeat some verses; that failed to rouse her. She tried counting a hundred, which proved more sleepy work still; she rubbed her eyes, clapped her hands, pinched herself, but all in vain; in spite of her efforts, the drowsiness natural to her situation overpowered her, and in less than half an hour after

first entering the tree she fell into a profound slumber.

This sleep would in all probability have been Isabel's last, had not a shepherd, looking for a stray sheep, happened to pass by. His attention was drawn to the tree, by observing that his dog kept barking and whining round it, scratching at its roots, and evidently much excited. Thinking his lost sheep might be in the old trunk, he forced his way through the drifted snow, and peeping into the cavity, was greatly surprised to see a young girl there.

Moved with compassion, he took the apparently lifeless Isabel in his arms, and carried her to his cottage, which was not far distant; followed by the delighted dog.

When Isabel came to her senses, she was much astonished at finding herself lying before a blazing wood fire, surrounded by the shepherd, his wife, and seven or eight children, two or three of whom were playing with a large dog.

"Where am I?" she exclaimed. "I thought I was in the hollow oak tree?"

"You may thank God you are in a better place," said the shepherd, reverently. "Aye, and you may thank the dog Toby, too. If you had staid where you was much longer, you would not have been alive in the morning."

When Isabel understood that under Heaven she owed her life to this good man, she thanked him warmly, and caressed the faithful Toby, a great ugly gaunt creature, but affectionate and sagacious. She enquired if the lost sheep had been found.

"Yes," said the shepherd, with a smile. "Toby had no sooner got home, and seen you safe indoors, than he made a dart in quite another direction. I followed, and there, down in a ditch, not a hundred yards from the fold, was the sheep; it had tumbled in, and could not get out again."

The shepherd's wife gave Isabel some warm bread and milk, which the poor girl was very glad of. She was then asked how she came to be out by herself on such a cold, stormy night. She told the good people that she was on her

way to Farmer Stockwell's, of Wyke Farm, and asked the shepherd if he knew of such a person. He replied that he did not, but his master might—he would ask him in the morning.

The shepherd thought Greystock was about seven miles distant. To Isabel it seemed that she had come much further.

“I hope,” she said presently, “that my staying all night will not inconvenience you.”

“No,” said the shepherd. “Our's is but a poor place, but we are sheltered from the weather.”

His wife then led Isabel to a small inner room, containing little besides two straw mattresses. On one of these, three or four little children were sleeping, the other was destined for their young guest. Here, with no other covering than a small woollen rug, Isabel, worn out with fatigue, soon fell asleep, and slept soundly till morning.

When she awoke, she went into the “keeping-room,” where all the family were assembled. The children were watching their mother, who was preparing their breakfast of milk porridge.

The traveller saw with regret that the snow was still falling, and the shepherd told her it would probably continue for two or three days, judging by the dull leaden look of the sky.

"What am I to do!" exclaimed Isabel, sorrowfully, speaking her thoughts aloud.

"Why, stay here till the weather clears," said the shepherd heartily, "if you can put up with—"

"It is not that," Isabel interrupted, "but how can I trespass on your kindness, when I am unable to make you any amends?"

"One more or less will not make much difference, will it Goody?" said the shepherd to his wife; who answered by a smile. "We have a good supply of logs in the lean-to outside, the meal chest is well filled, master lets us have milk, and a bit of pork when a pig is killed. You are as welcome as daylight to share with us, young lass. So make yourself easy."

That day and the two following ones passed, and still the pitiless frost-laden blast howled round the cot, and died away over the desolate

moorlands; still the dense white flakes fell in almost incessant showers. Isabel felt it was selfish to do nothing but watch the weather, she tried to be cheerful and contented. The children were good and tractable, with yellow locks and ruddy cheeks; they were quite willing to be friendly with Isabel. One little boy interested her particularly, as he reminded her of her brother Arthur. They would all draw round her, by the warm hearth, and listen with delight to the simple stories she told, or the songs she sung them. In the evenings, when the younger children were asleep, she would entertain the shepherd and his wife with accounts of the outer, and to them almost unknown world; or with what they liked better still, with some of her own adventures.

The third evening after her arrival, Isabel retired sorrowfully to rest, for she was impatient to get to the farm. But next morning she was agreeably surprised to find that there was a change in the weather; a heavy rain had melted much of the snow, and a mild west wind was

blowing. A thaw had set in, and so, notwithstanding the wet and muddy state of the country, she wrapped her plaid round her and told the shepherd, who had learned the direction in which Wyke Farm lay, that she was ready to go with him. First, she took a kind leave of his wife and family, who had become very fond of her, especially one little boy, who clung to her dress, unwilling to let her go, till she promised to come again, and bring him a toy horse. She had forced her humble hostess to accept the shilling Mr. Benson had lent her, which seemed quite a small fortune to the good woman—the value of a shilling being much higher then than in our day.

The shepherd guided her about a mile, explained how she was to go, and said, as he bade her good-bye—

“Do not forget to come and see us again. We shall be glad to hear you have found your friends, and poor little Charley is broken hearted at losing you.”

Isabel thanked him, and said she should never forget him and his family.

She walked on for some time, but presently found she did not know the road so well as she had expected. Everything looked so changed from what it had been when she was in the neighbourhood before; then the trees were covered with leaves, the ground with grass and flowers, now the trees were bare, and the surface of the earth hidden with half-melted snow.

It was again freezing sharply, in fact, the high bleak ground over which she was now passing, was scarcely affected by the thaw. She kept perseveringly on until past noon, when she began to be very much afraid that she was again going wrong. It seemed, indeed, as though there was a spell against her ever going right.

CHAPTER XX.

NO GHOST!

THE young traveller stood still, in extreme perplexity, to consider which of two roads, or rather tracks, was likely to be the right one. She knew how thinly peopled this part of the country was, and dreaded the consequences that might ensue did she fail to reach Wyke Farm before nightfall. If she could obtain a guide! She would stop with this object at the first house or cottage—the poorer the better—in her experience the humble classes had been her best friends.

While she was thus standing, a respectably dressed man with a goodnatured face came by, who, struck by Isabel's disconsolate appearance, stopped and asked her what was the matter.

She told him she had lost her way, and asked if he could direct her Wyke Farm.

"Oh yes," he replied, "I know James Stockwell, indeed we are in a manner connected; as his father's sister married my wife's brother-in-law's second cousin. He always calls at my inn for a chat and a horn of ale when he comes this way. But you look very weary; if you like to come with me—it is not far to go—and have some dinner, you are welcome; and afterwards my daughter shall walk with you part of the way to Wyke Farm. It is about six miles off. Nay, do not hesitate—a friend of Farmer Stockwell's must be a friend of mine."

Isabel thankfully accepted this proposal, and the innkeeper took her to his hostelry, a small but comfortable house, before which was a water trough for horses, and a large sign-board, bearing the words—"God encompasses us."*

After a peep into the kitchen, with its ranges of bright pewter vessels, its blazing fire, at which

* A century or two later corrupted to the "Goat and Compasses!"

a huge joint was roasting by the aid of that now extinct race of patient, hardworking animals, a turnspit dog, and where the daughter of the house, a merry-faced, active young woman, was assisting the cook in preparations for what seemed to be a goodly supply of pancakes—it was Shrove Tuesday—and no luck, the landlord said gravely, could be expected if that ancient culinary rite was not observed—after a glance into this interesting domestic region, Isabel was conducted into the parlour, a neat room with sanded brick floor, its walls hung with scripture prints and ballads; where she was desired to take off her plaid and sit down.

Shrove Tuesday! The 3rd of March, as reference to the sheet-almanac nailed to a wooden screen told her. How time had passed—un-noted in her singular isolation from civilized life!

Her eyes wandered to a pile of broadsheets that lay on a small table near her, and presently rested on the following advertisement—

“Lost, on 29th of current month, a girl aged 13, tall and slight for her years, with long dark

hair, black eyes, and pale complexion, had on a light green gown, grey beaver hat and feather, and brodered crimson scarf—”

Isabel could read no more ; she started up, exclaiming, “ That is meant for me ! I am sure of it.”

“ Eh ? ” said the innkeeper looking up in surprise from the ledger he was studying.

On hearing his young guest’s explanation, he said ; “ I turned this lot of old papers out of a closet this morning. This one bears date August 31st.

“ Two days after I was lost ! ” said Isabel. “ Pray sir,” she asked, for the letters swam before her eyes, “ is the advetisement in any broadsheet of later date ? ”

The landlord examined the pile carefully, and shook his head.

“ I see,” said Isabel sighing, “ the advertisement was inserted before they found my hat by the lake, and gave me up for dead ! ”

She finished reading the paragraph, and saw that a large reward was offered to anyone who

should give tidings of her, to the address of Mr. Harris, general shop keeper, Graystock.

“ Perhaps my mother may still send to that town, on the chance of letters or news of me ;” thought Isabel. So excited was she by this discovery, that she could do but small justice to the excellent dinner now placed on the table ; indeed, but for her unwillingness to appear rude to her hospitable entertainers, she would have set out on the very instant, so impatient was she to see and question the farmer.

The innkeeper’s daughter obligingly accompanied her more than half way to Wyke Farm, then giving her clear and precise directions as to her route, left the young girl to continue her journey. Isabel arrived at her place of destination without further adventure, and saw, with a sense of joyfulness the steep gables and square chimneys of the old farm, with its straw-strewn yard of cackling poultry and well-fed cattle. Quickening her steps she rapped at the door, and being admitted by a farm servant, saw all the family, with the exception of the farmer himself,

sitting at the long oak table ready for their early supper. She approached the farmer's wife, who, at the head of the board, was in the act of carving a huge round of beef, when raising her eyes for a moment, she espied Isabel, and started up, dropping her knife and fork with a cry of surprise, almost of alarm.

"Why," she said, staring fixedly at the new comer, "if I did not know for sure and certain that she was dead, I should say this was Miss Isabel St. Clair! or—Heaven save us! can it be her ghost?"

"No, Mrs. Stockwell," said Isabel coming close, and holding out her hand, "it is I myself alive—I am no ghost."

"Is it possible, my dear young lady? Then you were not drowned in that dreadful lake?" And just touching Isabel, as if to make sure she was not mistaken, the farmer's wife in the respectful fashion of the age, dropped her best curtsy to the young lady.

Isabel enquired eagerly if Mrs. Stockwell could give her any tidings of her mother, and

was answered by a melancholy shake of the head. "You had better take a bit of supper, dear Miss," she said, "I know you don't mind our homely ways."

"I am interrupting you," said Isabel, and she took a seat at the table. The party was large, the farm servants, as was customary in those days, sitting at the lower end of the board; and the mistress was so busy attending to their wants and her children's, that there was little leisure for conversation until supper was over, and the men and maids had dispersed to their several avocations.

Then Isabel again enquired about her mother.

"Well, my dear," said the farmer's wife, "her grief—I may say her agony—was sad to witness. My husband was almost wild, too, for he felt as if it was partly his fault you were lost."

"No—it was all my own wilfulness," said Isabel sorrowfully. "But pray go on."

"They dragged the lake," said the farmer's wife. "It was not till next day your things were found."

“Did not the pony come home?”

“No—it was probably kidnapped—as we at first fancied you might have been. A strange man had been seen prowling about the harvest fields.”

“Poor Arthur would be very unhappy too,” said Isabel.

“Dear little fellow, yes! We thought he would have gone into convulsions, his grief was so great.”

“My husband drove them both home himself,” continued the good woman, “and was able to be of use in several matters of business. As Mrs. St. Clair was bent on going abroad, he advised her to ask your great relation’s leave to sell the house, which was granted. Before she started she sent us a letter, and a handsome present.”

Isabel asked to see her mother’s letter, which request was readily granted. Her tears flowed fast, as she saw the well-known handwriting; the letter spoke of long absence from England; the mother saying she could not bear to stay where

everything recalled her dear lost child. She concluded by saying that *if ever* she returned to her native land, she would certainly see her friends at Wyke Farm, whose kindness she should always remember."

This confirmation of her mother's departure seemed to extinguish Isabel's last hope. Giving way to her grief, she wept long and bitterly.

Mrs. Stockwell waited until the violence of the young girl's emotion had subsided, then gently tried to comfort her.

"Do not grieve so sadly, my dear young lady," she said, "we will do all in our power to help you find your mother again. When my husband comes home he will advise you better than I can, and of course you will stay with us as long as ever you like."

Isabel thanked her, and strove to be calm. She took notice of the children, and enquired where the farmer was gone, and when he was expected to return.

Mrs. Stockwell hesitated, and looked mysterious, while her face betrayed some anxiety.

"Why," she said, "I cannot tell exactly—indeed I do not know. He's gone with a gentleman—a friend, I mean—on important business. Glad enough shall I be to see him home again, for the place is not a bit like itself when he's away. He has been absent three days already."

It was now dusk, and Isabel finding how eager the family were to hear her adventures, good-naturedly offered to gratify their curiosity, although very tired. This time she omitted nothing, but spoke of her imprisonment in the castle, and her escape from the robbers, for she was now in a safe asylum, with friends who would protect her. The recital was listened to with breathless interest, and on its conclusion Mrs. Stockwell regaled the whole party with hot spiced elder wine. At a far later hour than usual they retired to rest, Mrs. Stockwell conducting Isabel to the best room in the house, saying she hoped the young lady would feel herself at home, and bidding her heartily welcome in her husband's name as well as her own.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FARMER'S RETURN.

ISABEL awoke on the morning following her arrival at Wyke Farm, with a sense of protection and safety to which she had long been a stranger. The dread of again falling into the hands of the robbers, which had haunted her ever since her escape from the castle, was now removed. Although the uncertainty that clouded her future made her at times restless and unhappy, she felt truly grateful to be once more with kind, if humble friends ; and in return for their endeavours to amuse and cheer her, she did her best to enter into their various occupations and interests.

The evening of the second day, she again questioned Mrs Stockwell about her husband's absence. The farmer's wife, although she said

but little, was evidently anxious and uneasy, frequently going to the door, or sending one of the children to the gate, "to look for father."

"Indeed, I know no more than you do when he will be back, Miss," was the answer, "I wish I did."

These words were hardly spoken when a loud rap was heard at the door. Kitty, the eldest girl, ran to open it, and Isabel was glad to see farmer Stockwell enter ; but what was her surprise and joy, when immediately behind him she recognized the Lieutenant ! He looked pale and worn, and so weary and exhausted that he could scarcely stagger to a chair, which good Mrs. Stockwell placed for him, where he remained apparently unconscious of all that passed. The farmer was in a moment surrounded by his family, so that he did not, in the deepening twilight, at first distinguish Isabel, who was standing in the background a little behind the others.

After embracing his wife and children, Mr. Stockwell, with two or three of the younger ones clinging to him, turned to the young cavalier

whom Isabel as yet knew by no name but
"Lieutenant," and said, kindly—

"Do not take on so sadly, sir. It can't be helped. You have done all that lies in your power to —"

"No," said the lieutenant, making an impatient gesture with one hand, while he covered his face with the other, "No, my kind friend ; never shall I cease to reproach myself for my selfish, unmanly conduct ! Why, why did I run away, and leave that noble-minded young girl, who saved my life at the expense of her own ! Why, if I could not save her, did I not stay and perish with her ?"

As he finished speaking he raised his eyes, and for the first time saw Isabel, who had come up to him. His astonishment was so extreme, that he could not for some time believe that he saw aright. Starting from his seat he took both her hands and gazed at her intently ; until being convinced that there was no delusion, he was almost as much overpowered with joy as he had before been with grief.

After the expiration of a few moments, Isabel turned to the farmer, who stood staring in great bewilderment at her and her companion, unable to utter a word, and scarcely knowing if he were awake or in a dream. His wife, who was surprised and mystified at the mutual recognition of Isabel and the strange gentleman, seemed also struck dumb, and unable to afford any explanation.

But when Isabel approached the farmer, saying—"Do you not recollect me, Mr. Stockwell, and how you let me ride your pony?" her voice and face returned to his memory, and more amazed than ever, he exclaimed—

"Miss Isabel! is it possible you were not drowned after all—that you were the young lady our friend here has been breaking his heart about? Well, wonders never cease!"

"Tell me," said the Lieutenant, earnestly, to Isabel, "how you escaped; for to see you here seems little short of a miracle."

Isabel told him in few words, then begged her former fellow prisoner to inform her of all that had befallen him since their separation.

"As the gentleman is not strong, and it is a long story," threw in the farmer, "suppose, wife, you fetch my tankard of ale first. We have had some hard work, I assure you."

The ale was quickly brought, and the Lieutenant, with his three eager auditors, having seated themselves, the young man said, looking at Isabel—

"You may imagine, for I cannot describe, my consternation when I found you were re-captured by the robbers. After a frantic but vain attempt to force open the iron door—I felt it was worse than useless to linger where I was—my only thought was now to raise a party to rescue you. But I could not leave the castle until I ascertained whether the men brought you out with them, so remained hidden behind the old archway until they had all left the cave. You still lived, were still a prisoner, I thought; and this gave me strength and courage."

"Then you hastened away?" asked Isabel.

"As fast as my weakness would allow; choosing the open country. It is wonderful how I escaped,

for the robbers were scattered everywhere over the cliffs and downs ; several passed close by me, as I fled away in the moonlight, now hiding under some stunted tree or rock, now darting on again. My life was valuable for your sake. If I could but evade pursuit, I thought, I would seek assistance at the first house I came to.

“ My pursuers, knowing the start I had, would probably go on too far a-head. In a contest of speed I could have no chance. I must depend on stratagem. The night passed in wandering, and when daylight began to dawn, I ascended a hill, and climbed a high tree, to reconnoitre. But I tire you ?”

“ Oh, no, indeed !” cried all his auditors, “ pray tell us everything.”

“ The only human habitation in sight,” pursued the Lieutenant, “ was a house with pointed gables, standing amongst Scotch fir trees. It was about a mile distant. I noted its latitude and longitude, as we say at sea, and resolved to steer for it shortly. Being very weary, I leaned back against the branches for a short rest, and

had slumbered a few minutes when I was startled by the sound of voices, which I recognized as those of the Robber Captain and Lawless.!"

"Oh !" cried Isabel, "what did you do ?"

"I kept still, scarcely daring to breathe. I heard the captain say with an oath—'Baffled ; we are lost !' 'He has eluded us as yet,' replied Lawless, 'but, cunning as he is, he will never escape us all !'

"I felt somewhat reassured," continued the Lieutenant, "for I had feared they were on my trail. The pair, like myself, had probably mounted rising ground to get a distant view. The tree, some foreign kind of oak, had yet a good many leaves remaining on it. Presently the gruff voice of the Captain resumed, 'If we had still got our faithful bloodhound, I warrant he'd have had Master Lieutenant long before this !' 'Never mind,' said Foxy, 'the fellow is such a queer customer to look at, he'll not find many to harbour him ! Any way, such a starved, disreputable wretch, with clothes only fit for a scarecrow, will not be difficult to trace.'"

"Upon my word, sir," said the Farmer laughing, "they were not over and above complimentary to your personal appearance. Your yeoman's garb suits you better."

"Yes, indeed," answered the Lieutenant, smiling also—one of those sad, dreamy smiles, which had once or twice during their brief acquaintance brought to Isabel some dim far off recollection, as if she had seen his face before.

"Go on sir, please, go on," said Mrs. Stockwell impatiently.

"Glad enough was I," pursued the young man, "when I heard the retreating footsteps of the robbers, who at the foot of the hill were joined by another of the crew; a fellow who was known by the name of Long Sam. I waited a few minutes, then left my tree, and crept cautiously down hill. At the foot of the hill I saw a powder-flask. I picked it up, and was proceeding when I heard the sound of returning steps! A shout from the three robbers almost instantly told me that I was discovered. All fired, but missed me; and fear lending me unnatural strength, I flew

like a hunted hare over the level country. They followed at full speed. My survey of the objects around me stood me in good stead. I had traced the windings of a river, and now made for its banks. In my early days I had been proud of my abilities as a swimmer. I would test them now. My three pursuers were close at my heels, urging each other on, when with one leap I sprang into the river! A cry of 'now we have him!' arose from the robbers, and a volley of large stones assailed me. One heavy flint struck me on the head, and almost stunned me, as I rose from the water.

"That has settled him!" "He's done for!" rung in my ears. I threw up my arms with a despairing shriek, to humour this notion; then dived deep under water. I remained beneath the surface as long as I possibly could, rose for a moment to take breath, but instantly dived again, anxious to put a considerable distance between myself and my enemies. Rising again, I ventured to take one hasty glance round; only one man was

visible, who was following the course of the stream. I had taken care to make my way *against* the current; which fortunately at that place was not strong—knowing that the robbers would as a matter of course, look for my body down stream. Once more I dived, and when I again looked, no sign of the robbers was visible.”

“You had indeed a fearfully narrow escape,” said Isabel, pale with excitement.

“I swam some distance farther,” said the Lieutenant, “then—for I was chilled to the marrow — ventured to leave the river and walked—

“In the direction of the house?” asked Isabel.

“Yes; but it was long ere I reached it, weak and exhausted as I was. An old house steward answered my summons. I told my story, of the truth of which he was evidently suspicious. My appearance was against me; but I told him I was a gentleman, and begged him to call his master.”

“‘My master, so to speak, is a mistress,’ said

the old man. 'I serve two maiden ladies of advanced age; the Misses Grimsby of Gaunt Manor. You must see, sir, that two aged and infirm gentlewomen are not the persons to apply to!' 'Use your own influence, then,' I exclaimed. There must be men about the place. 'Not enough to attack a den of robbers,' answered he. Once for all, I will have nothing to do with this matter. Go elsewhere—you have made an unfortunate choice?' This seemed true, and I sorrowfully turned to depart. The ancient servitor, softened, took me to the side-board, and gave me a bowl of rich spiced wine, and some white bread. This revived me for a time, but presently, after wandering about the wild desolate country, fatigue and the long strain on my strength overcame me, I could not think—all was confusion in my brain, and creeping into a rocky cavern, I lay down, and must have slept for many hours, for when I roused again it was dark night."

"What happened next?" enquired Isabel.

"I had not walked far," the Lieutenant con-

tinned, "before a waggon overtook me; the driver said he was going to one of the great northern towns, and offered to give me a lift. As I could not do any more, until day came again, I gladly availed myself of his offer, and must have travelled with him some twenty miles. At the inn where we stopped early in the morning, I was fortunate enough to meet with this worthy farmer, to whom I told my tale, and who believed me, in spite of appearances. He was going home, and took me with him; provided me with respectable clothes, and promised to assist me in my quest."

"Aye," interposed the farmer, "I could do no less. His story, strange though it was, bore the stamp of truth, and I saw he was a cavalier and a gentleman. So impatient was he to execute his mission, that I could hardly persuade him to stay for necessary refreshment. I took four or five of my men with me, with such arms as we could raise."

"Little time was lost, I assure you," continued the young man, addressing Isabel, "in going to

the nearest magistrate, to obtain a warrant for the apprehension of those ruffians. Indeed, so numerous and daring had been the robberies and other crimes committed in the county of late, that the magistrate entered most warmly into the business, placing a strong constabulary force at our service; our numbers being further increased by several volunteers, yeomen and gentlemen, guests of the magistrate, whose son, a fine, spirited youth, also accompanied us, showing great zeal in the cause."

"We made, indeed, a pretty good muster," said Farmer Stockwell, "and it was necessary, with such desperate villains to contend with, in their own den."

"We waited till nightfall," resumed the lieutenant, "and then, marching under cover of the darkness, reached the old castle a little after midnight."

"Were they all in their cave?" asked Isabel, greatly excited.

"Yes; we passed through the trap door, and forced the lock of the centre iron door, which of

course alarmed the men. They fired upon us, then retreated to their stronghold, barricading the inner door, which, after vainly calling on them to surrender in the King's name, we had great difficulty in forcing. I will not dwell on what followed. The smugglers made a desperate resistance, but were at last overpowered, and, securely guarded, were taken off to prison, there to await their trial at the summer assizes."

"Did they recognize you, their former prisoner?" enquired Isabel.

"That they did," threw in the farmer. "They were so furious, after thinking him dead, too, to see him alive and free, that they would have torn him in pieces but for us and others interposing. Several of our men were wounded; how this gentleman escaped is a wonder, for he was reckless, and always in the thickest of the fray."

"Our object was to capture, not kill, the robbers," added the Lieutenant. "My first thought naturally was for you, child. Judge of my dismay, my anguish of mind, when I found you not! The robbers, when questioned, after their capture,

maintained a sullen silence, all but Wildman, who said you were dead. In vain did we search in the remotest recesses of the dungeon, no trace of you was to be seen."

"Aye," said Farmer Stockwell, "I thought our friend here would have gone raving mad. The only female in the place was a hideous old hag, whose screams and howling were heard above everything."

"Dame Crab," said Isabel. "What was done with her?"

"She at first refused to leave the cave," said the Lieutenant, "but knowing what a hard-hearted old creature she was, I had her handcuffed and removed with the men as their accomplice. It was perhaps the most charitable proceeding, for let the populace catch sight of her, and it will not be long before she suffers as a witch. I will only now add, that large quantities of plate and other valuable articles were seized; and are lodged in safe custody, until such time as they can be identified, and claimed by their respective owners."

CHAPTER XXII.

A GREAT DISCOVERY.

“AND now, my dear young lady,” said the Lieutenant, with tender courtesy, to Isabel, “I want you to tell me about yourself, so that my first care may be to restore you to your family, from which—if I rightly understood the brief sketch you gave me of your history—you are, by some accident, separated. I am not destitute of fortune. Before leaving India, I deposited the bulk of my property in safe keeping. Some time must elapse ere I can communicate with the agents at Madras; but in the interval, if I can establish my identity, and prove that I was not lost in the schooner *Henriette*, I shall doubtless be able to raise funds sufficient for present purposes. As I said before, my kind young friend and deliverer,

to whom I owe life and freedom, your interests shall be as they ought, my first care."

Isabel thanked him earnestly, but said, "Do not think about me at present. You must have dear relatives and friends, whom after so long an absence, you must be most anxious to see again."

An expression of pain clouded the young man's face.

"My only remaining relatives," he said, "have deserted the cause of the Stuarts—there can be no sympathy between us. Though it is not I—but my kindred—who have severed the ties that bound us. England is no more a home for me. When you are restored to home and friends, I quit my native land—this time for ever."

"You are aware that the good cause once more triumphs, sir?" Farmer Stockwell ventured to suggest.

"Yes; I gathered the news of King Charles' restoration from the smugglers. My relatives may now be paying the penalty of their desertion, and languishing in poverty and neglect, unless

they have again turned with the tide. Only those who, like me, have wandered for long years in foreign lands, can imagine the intense longing to look in the face of a kinsman, to grasp once more a hand endeared by relationship! But no more of this."

"Yes, indeed," said Isabel, earnestly. "Perhaps your relatives, like many others, supported Cromwell's cause to stop the horrors of that dreadful civil war. At any rate, go to them first. I am with kind people, leave me—"

"No, do not speak of such a thing!" was the indignant rejoinder. "I will never leave you, on my word as a gentleman and a cavalier, until I have restored you to your friends. Can I forget all I owe you? No, it shall never be said with truth that George St. Clair is mean, selfish, and ungrateful!"

At these words Isabel looked fixedly at the face of the speaker, then hurriedly asked him what his name was.

"St. Clair—George St. Clair. Do you know the name?"

"Yes, indeed I do," said Isabel. "It is my own!"

"Yours! Isabel, too! The name of one whom I loved as the dearest sister. Can it be that you are her child, the child of my brother—Major Arthur St. Clair."

"The same—and you—you must surely be my dear uncle, who went away to sea many years ago, when he was only sixteen years old, to join Prince Rupert?"

He bowed his head in answer.

"Your mother," he asked eagerly, "is she alive? Is she well?"

"I hope, I trust so," was the trembling, tearful answer. "She was well when I last saw her, six months ago. Where she is now I know not. I fear in some foreign land. But at least," the girl added, her colour rising, and her eyes flashing, "she has never been false to the King's cause, the cause for which my father died, however she may have suffered! My brother, too, is the dearest little fellow, so good and true!"

The Lieutenant—or as he must now be called—

Captain St. Clair, for such was his rank in the navy, now rose, and taking Isabel's hands, looked in her face for a few moments, with a deep, earnest gaze, then embraced her affectionately.

"My own dear brother's child," he said with emotion. "How could I ever believe that one of our true-hearted race could be a traitor!"

"Dear uncle," murmured Isabel, with tears of joy in her eyes, "I can never be desolate now. But oh, if my mother and Arthur—"

"We will find them, dear Isabel; we will not rest till we have found them," said her uncle, confidently. "But tell me all our family history—all that has happened since I went away."

Isabel told him, as briefly as she could, of the treacherous conduct of their kinsman Maurice, who had sided with the Puritans, and yet on the restoration of the Stuarts made it appear that he had all along been in league with General Monk to bring back the King. She also told him how this heartless man had by flattery and

bribery induced Charles to bestow on him the estates so recently given back to Arthur."

When she told of this, St. Clair's brow darkened.

"The consummate villain!" he exclaimed. "It was he who told me that Major St. Clair's widow had been persuaded to desert the royal cause. I had it under his own hand and seal. Now I see his motive—to keep me away from England!"

"Why did you not write to my mother, dear uncle," asked Isabel.

"I did, my dear child. Maurice and I met in a distant land, and I entrusted to him my letter, which he promised faithfully to deliver. I waited impatiently for the answer, which he was to send by a merchant captain, a friend of his. We have, as you are aware, no regular posts to distant lands. Well, I waited for your mother's answer to my letter, in which I had prayed her to consider me as her protector, her brother, her devoted kinsman. The answer came at last. It was my own letter, returned unopened! Maurice, the

wicked hypocrite, professed great concern for me; he had done all in his power, he said, to soften your mother's heart, but she had rejected my letter with contempt, abjuring me and all Royalists; she had gone over to the Puritan cause, and had even, my false kinsman told me, hinted at the likelihood of her speedily forming a matrimonial alliance with old Lambert Moncton, the possessor of her late husband's confiscated property."

"How cruel, how false! He is worse than I thought him!" exclaimed Isabel.

"He shall answer for his guilt," pursued Captain St. Clair. "As you may imagine, Isabel, I no longer looked forward to a speedy return to England. I threw all my energies into foreign service. I was successful in several encounters with pirates, who infested the Brazilian seas. I then indulged my wish to see India, and traded largely with merchants and natives in that country. I was bound for Havre de Grace, a French port, when I fell in with the smugglers. That part of my history you know."

Isabel asked her uncle if he remembered bidding her good-bye, before he went to join Prince Rupert, when she was a very young child.

"Quite well," he answered. "Your little face, as you looked up at me, with baby fingers clinging to one of the buttons on my sailor's uniform, has often come before me in my dreams of home, during my long midnight watches on the silent deck. I promised to bring home a fortune for my little lassie—that promise I am happy to be able to redeem, Isabel."

During this little scene, Farmer Stockwell and his wife had, with native delicacy of feeling, withdrawn to some distance, leaving the newly discovered relatives to themselves. But now Captain St. Clair, leading Isabel by the hand, approached the worthy couple, to thank them anew for all their kindness, and to receive their hearty congratulations.

"Had I known you was a St. Clair, sir," said the farmer, "I should have been still more zealous to serve you, if possible."

"Scarcely, my kind friend. Not knowing your politics, I purposely avoided the mention of my name as a well-known Royalist one."

The conversation again turned on the usurper Maurice.

"Had I been with you, Isabel," said her uncle, "that bold rascal should have had a hard fight before he got possession of the old place. I would have defended it stoutly. I was at the siege of Reading, when not more than a lad. Now, the question is how to oust him."

"Unless we could recover the casket, with the deed of gift," said Isabel, "I fear we have not much chance."

"Is not Clarendon still at the helm?" asked the captain.

"Only nominally," said the farmer. "His virtues seem a reproach to the King's vices, and the King hates him. To ask a favour through the Earl, they say, is the sure way not to have it granted. When he lets go the rudder, to speak in your seafaring language, I fear the ship Charles will soon be wrecked."

"May I remind you all," said Mrs. Stockwell, "that it is high time to come to supper."

"True, Dame," said her husband, who, with the rest, readily obeyed this summons, and did ample justice to the good cheer. The farmer's wife, who was of rather a sentimental turn of mind, discovered a wonderful likeness in the faces of the two St. Clairs. True, the captain's was thin, and had that wan pallor peculiar to those long confined without light or air, but his eyes had not lost their brightness, his features were clearly cut, and regular, while his hair, of rich golden brown, fell in long curls, after the fashion of cavaliers of that day, and his beard (which had been trimmed since Isabel last saw him, was pointed, and of moderate length. His yeoman's suit became him well enough, or rather he carried off the costume with an easy grace that showed him to be a thorough gentleman.

Isabel had regained some of the youthful bloom, of which her recent sufferings and privations had deprived her; although still delicate looking, her face had retained its oval contour,

while her dark eyes had an expression of thoughtfulness almost beyond her years.

The meal was a pleasant one; between earnest discourse and innocent mirth the evening wore away, and all under the roof of Wyke Farm were wrapped in sound repose long before midnight.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CASKET.

AN earnest conference was held next day at the farm as to the best means to be used for the discovery of Mrs. St. Clair. Advertisements might be tried, but the lady, believing her daughter was dead, would not be looking for them, and if she were on the Continent would be unlikely to see English papers ; the communication between our country and foreign lands being at that time casual and uncertain. Isabel was most anxious that her uncle should take her to France and other parts of the Continent, which he willingly promised to do, should search in England prove fruitless. At the same time he warned the young girl that it would be extremely difficult to trace the route of a private individual, travelling

on the Continent. Mrs. St. Clair might have settled in some obscure place. "But cheer up, my dear," said her kind uncle, "no means shall be left untried." The farmer suggested an application to Maurice St. Clair. Whatever his character he was now the head of the house; the widow had communicated with him on matters of business; she derived her income from him; he must possess some clue to her whereabouts.

"To be sure, I will write at once," said Captain St. Clair.

"Excuse the liberty, sir, but don't you do any such thing," interposed the farmer's wife. "You say he deceived you once—and for why? To keep you out of the way;—he believes you dead, or far beyond the seas. Show yourself later, if you will, when you are more in a position to cope with him, but not now. Let Miss Isabel write a few lines, saying she is alive, and asking if he knows where her mother is. That will excite no suspicion, and be likely to bring a true answer.

This was felt to be wise counsel, and a man on

horseback was sent over to St. Clair Hall that very day with Isabel's letter. A cold but not uncivil answer was returned, to the effect that at the widow's request a sum sufficient to produce the yearly income allowed for her maintenance, had been placed at her disposal, to invest as she thought fit. A brief acknowledgement of this, simply dated London, had closed the correspondence. Maurice congratulated his young kinswoman on her escape, and regretted he could not give her the information she desired.

Captain St. Clair wrote by the first post to Messrs. Straughan, the English bankers and agents for the Madras firm; telling of his misadventures, and giving tests of his personal identity. But as a fortnight at least must elapse before an answer could be returned, the Captain spoke to Farmer Stockwell on behalf of himself and his niece, apologizing for trespassing so long on his hospitality, but trusting in time to find some way of making amends to him and his kind wife.

The good farmer replied that he was proud and happy to have such guests; and with

thoughtful kindness, begged Captain St. Clair to accept the temporary accommodation of a loan from his savings in the county bank.

In due time a satisfactory answer was received from Messrs. Straughan and Co., congratulating their client on his escape from shipwreck and prison, assuring him his interests had been well cared for in the interval, and begging him to draw on the firm for whatever money he might require.

Meantime a meeting was appointed to be held at Carlisle with the object of restoring the property found in the robbers' cave to the rightful owners. Isabel, who was much interested, expressed a wish to be present; her uncle promised to take her, and the farmer said he should also like to go.

"Not that I have any lost property to get back again," he added, smiling.

"Unless it was the handsome time-piece—my father's wedding present to us," threw in his wife, "that you let a man have to repair, though I advised you not, and which we never saw again."

"But the robbers were not clock-makers, dame," said the farmer.

"No ; but they pretended to be, sometimes," said Isabel. "I remember such a pretty cuckoo clock being brought in—"

"It might be the very one," said Mrs. Stockwell, eagerly. "I know I lost countless fat pullets, ducks and turkeys."

"You won't get them back again, my dear, I'll warrant," said her husband laughing.

Before the important day, orders given at the county town, enabled Isabel and her uncle to obtain garments more suitable to their station than those they had been wearing.

Captain St. Clair chose the dark-blue naval uniform, with gilt buttons and cocked hat, to which he was entitled as Post-Captain in the royal navy ; a costume often worn by officers on shore as well as at sea ; with the sword and sword-belt, indispensable to an English gentleman, in those days. Isabel's costume was a black satin gown, slashed with rose colour, a short, hooded mantle of purple velvet, and a low

crowned hat with broad brim, trimmed with white ribbons.

Considering the period, when a reaction in favour of bright tints and rich fabrics had set in, replacing the "sad" colours and scanty garments of the Puritan ladies, the young girl's costume was as simple and unostentatious as it well could be, without affectation.

The day of the meeting arrived. A great lumbering vehicle called a coach, had been ordered to take the St. Clairs to Carlisle—drawn by four powerful horses; fewer could not have moved it, and etiquette required that number. The farmer preferred riding his stout cob; he had also mounted two or three of his servants as outriders, that his guests might go in proper state.

The day was fine and the roads in tolerable order—an important consideration at a time when coaches often stuck in the mire for hours—and the drive over the hills and breezy moors was enjoyed by the travellers, despite the jolting of their ponderous and springless carriage. Both looked with interest at the old town, whose gates

and fortifications had suffered considerably in the late civil war.

On this important day, persons of all classes poured in from every quarter, and the town-hall was filled to overflowing. The little party found seats not far from the platform, on which were assembled the county magistrates, and others in office. A body of constables stood ready to keep guard, and to bring forward the various articles for which owners had to be discovered.

Sir Lionel Beverley was chairman of the meeting; a stout portly man of fifty, on his right, with a cynical look on his hard but handsome face, was pointed out to Isabel as her kinsman, Maurice St. Clair; while in another magistrate she recognized her benevolent friend, Mr. Freemantle. The rest had no peculiar interest for her.

The business of the day commenced. Large quantities of plate were first produced, most of which was easily traced to its right owners, by the crest or cyphers on it. Many richly chased tankards and salvers were recognized, and

claimed ; as were also numerous articles of jewellery and ornament. Pictures, old china, a bird cage, minus the parrot—all manner of things only to be characterized as nondescript, followed. An old man rejoiced in the recovery of his cremona ; a naval Captain claimed his chronometer, Mr. Freemantle identified a silver goblet which had been abstracted from his side-board ; Farmer Stockwell got back his cuckoo clock. Some articles of little worth except from association, were restored, although these were few, such being speedily turned into money by the robbers.

All this occupied a considerable time, but Isabel looked on with unflagging interest. It was so agreeable, to see people rejoice in the recovery of their property, and she felt a pardonable pride at the thought of having been, in some measure, instrumental to this end. Somehow it got whispered about, that the young girl sitting beside the pale, handsome naval officer, had been a prisoner in the robbers' den ; and many were the looks of interest and curiosity directed towards

her, whilst her quiet, ladylike appearance produced a favourable impression.

Unconscious that she was the subject of remark, Isabel continued to watch the animated scene before her; when a circumstance occurred which brought her prominently into notice.

The day's work seemed nearly concluded, few articles of consequence remained, with one exception; this was a casket of rare and beautiful workmanship, which Isabel instantly recognized. She whispered a few words to her uncle, who led her forward; and telling one of the officials that the young lady by his side was a possible claimant of the casket, she was at once allowed to mount the platform.

"How exquisite"—"How beautiful!" were the exclamations of those near enough to see clearly the object under examination. On this several ladies pressed forward to obtain a better view, as they had done several times before when anything attractive was produced.

"Do let *me* see!" said a showily dressed, rather affected woman, with a thin anxious face,

high cheek bones, and a long neck. "Pray open it," she added—"I am dying—literally dying—to know what it contains."

"That is Lady Sophia St. Clair—Lord Mac Laclan's daughter," Isabel heard a bystander observe. "They say she has a very harsh husband."

"Excuse me, madam," said the gentleman, whom Isabel had recognized as her kind advocate, Mr. Freemantle; "but I was about to suggest to my brother magistrates that anyone making a claim to this casket should be requested to give some description of its contents before they are made public."

He spoke courteously though firmly, and everyone seemed to see the reasonableness of his suggestion.

"Where is the key?" asked the chairman. "I have seen none likely to open it, Sir Lionel," answered the constable. "These are some of the keys found in the castle." He held up a bunch, chiefly large and clumsy, then added "here is a small silver key, and here is a gold one."

"But," said the chairman, who held the casket in his hand, "these are both too large. How are we to get the lock, which is of the smallest dimensions, open? That is the question. An attempt has plainly been made by the robbers to force it, for here is a scratch on the enamelled surface."

"We shall have to borrow a key from Titania or Queen Mab," said Mr. Freemantle smiling.

"May I speak, sir?" said Isabel, who for some moments had been trying to make herself heard.

"Certainly," said the magistrate turning round, and catching sight of her earnest face. "Surely," he added, "I have seen that countenance before, and yet—"

"Yes sir," answered Isabel, "you saw me at Rock Cottage, when I went to seek my mother."

"Oh yes—I recollect. You have found her, I hope?"

"No sir," said Isabel, sadly and shyly; "but I have found a kind uncle."

"That is well. And you think you know something about this casket, do you?"

"Yes, sir, I know a great deal about it."

"Then you shall speak!" cried Mr. Freemantle, heartily; "for I know by experience that what you say is to the purpose."

"Is it not strange," interposed Maurice St. Clair, in a voice that struck Isabel as singularly harsh and unpleasant, "that so very young a person should profess to know anything about what is evidently of great value?"

Isabel glanced up quickly in the speaker's face. Was it possible he had a dim perception that this was the casket—the loss of which had been so favourable to his ambition?"

"We can but test the accuracy of her professions," said Sir Lionel Beverley. "A young person may be cognizant of family affairs. Will you favour us with your name, young lady?"

"My name, sir," Isabel replied respectfully, "is St. Clair. That casket belongs to my family, as I can prove to you."

"A bold assertion, young girl," said Maurice,

who had perceptibly changed colour. "Allow me to ask if you are prepared with witnesses to prove your identity, and to certify as to your character?"

"I will answer for both!" cried a fresh, boyish voice; and a tall gentlemanly youth of about sixteen, who had been sitting among the spectators, started up and advanced to the platform. Isabel at once recognized him as Hugh Beverley, Sir Lionel's eldest son, her favourite partner on the memorable day of the fête and the fire at St. Clair Hall. What a flood of varied recollections came thronging to her mind, at the sight of him! "I know her," pursued the young lad, "and so does my mother, and my sister Flora! I saw her risk her life to save this very casket from the flames, and envied her noble daring."

These words from the son of the chairman, one of the most important persons in the county, produced a marked sensation in the assembled crowd. Sir Lionel Beverley was the magistrate to whom Farmer Stockwell had applied for a warrent to take up the robbers; and young Hugh with a brave boy's natural delight in adventure,

had enlisted in the cause, little thinking that the young girl he went to rescue was no other than Isabel St. Clair.

A bow, a smile, an encouraging glance from Hugh, was all that time and the occasion permitted; but Isabel felt that she had a warm friend near.

Maurice St. Clair was the next to speak—

“Since this casket belongs to the St. Clairs,” he said, “I, as head of that ancient family, am the proper person to take charge of it.”

He held out his hand, but was met by a murmur of dissent. Maurice was not popular in the county. His sudden appearance had been attended by rumours of bribing and unfair play; the dispossession of the young heir so recently restored to his heritage, had not been accounted for satisfactorily to the neighbours. Had not Hugh Beverley been absent, engaged in pursuing his studies at college, at the time when the widow and her children left, he would have been sure to have heard the right version; as it was, he had questioned Maurice closely, much to that gentle-

man's annoyance; and ill-feeling existed between the two families, despite a superficial sort of friendship.

"If you are a claimant, sir," said the chairman, "you will not object to submit to the same tests to which others have submitted this day."

"N-o; yes! that is," stammered Maurice, "I—"

"Are you prepared," asked Sir Lionel, "to swear that the casket was ever your property?"

"Yes," answered Maurice, growing bolder, as he felt what great issues might be at stake. "It was mine once, but I relinquished it to the other branch of our family, who proved how little they thought of the treasure, by losing it!"

"What did it contain?" asked Mr. Freemantle.

"Jewels, and title deeds of the estate," answered Maurice, promptly.

"The advertisements, which we all saw, stated that much," observed the old magistrate. "We want a more crucial test than that. Eh, sir chairman?"

"May I be permitted to ask the gentleman one or two questions?" enquired Isabel.

Leave being granted, she said, looking full at Maurice—

“When the casket was in your possession, did you ever look at its contents?”

“Of course—often,” he replied, looking round with an air that said,—Is not this foolish trifling? But Isabel’s serious manner compelled attention. A deep silence prevailed in the crowded court. She went on—

“Pray how did you open it?”

“With the key!” was the answer. “This is really too childish!”

“Where did you keep the key?” pursued the questioner.

“On my watch-chain probably, or in my bureau,” said Maurice, with undisguised impatience. “May I ask, my good girl, what you are driving at?”

“I want you to find the key.”

“Ha, ha! that’s what we all want!”

“May I have the casket a few moments, sir?”

Isabel asked the chairman.

It was placed in her hands. After half a

minute's careful examination, in which she passed the point of her forefinger slowly over the smooth enamelled surface, she stopped, made a curious movement, and a firm pressure with her nail amidst the gold chasing, which described a sort of zone round the casket ; and, lo ! a small portion of the apparently solid wall slipped away, and disclosed an aperture of three quarters of an inch long, and half an inch broad, in which lay a tiny, jewelled, gold key ! She quietly handed the casket back to the chairman, who inspected this singular device with an air of surprise and interest, then fixing a keen look on Maurice St. Clair, said—

“ Pray is this where you kept the key of the casket ? ”

The usurper muttered something about a bad memory ; and was then invited to speak more minutely as to what the casket contained.

“ I have said all I choose to say,” he replied “ and may I beg that some reserve may be used as to the disclosure of family secrets, and matters of a purely private nature ? ”

"To be sure," said Mr. Freemantle. "We only want to identify, not to pry ! Let Miss St. Clair speak."

"The interior of the casket," said Isabel, in clear tones audible all over the court, "is divided into irregular compartments, fitted with slides, and secret places for holding documents or jewellery. In the centre one is a parchment with a grant of land from Edward III. to one of our ancestors, by name Clement St. Clair. It is tied with a faded cord of green silk, and may be looked at by the court without danger of revealing family secrets. Will you please see, sir?"

The chairman looked as directed, and the small antique yellow document was drawn to light.

"There are various other deeds and papers, which I could describe, but will not," said the young girl, glancing at her kinsman Maurice, "if what I can tell of the jewellery is thought sufficient. In the first compartment to the right is a ring, with a single large diamond."

Sir Lionel produced it, a splendid brilliant of

the first water, which shone like a star as the sun's rays flashed upon it.

"Under the stone," said Isabel, "is the cypher A. St. C. My grandfather's initials—also the date 1597. Shall I show it you?"

"Yes," said the chairman, "My fingers are too clumsy."

Isabel touched the secret spring, and the apparently firmly set diamond flew back; with a strong magnifying glass, several members of the board verified Isabel's statement.

In a circular receptacle, pointed out by the young girl, was a massive gold chain; on the amulet attached to which was engraved the family crest and motto;—a heart pierced by an arrow, and the words, "Faithfulle unto Deathe." She also called attention to a manuscript, in old English, written in small, beautiful characters, by an ancestor in the 14th century, who had brought the casket from Italy, and was its first proprietor. He willed it to be handed down to his descendants in the direct line, and, failing male issue, to a daughter. Failing the direct

line, it was to go to the "distante familie branche of St. Clairs, at Hardingstone, in Lincolnshire"—the place where Maurice St. Clair's ancestors had lived, and from whom he had inherited a small freehold estate.

This was decyphered, and read aloud by Sir Lionel Beverley, who was skilled in the old black letter of the 14th century; and deemed a conclusive proof of the identity of the casket.

"It belongs by right to your young brother, if he lives," said the Chairman, courteously, to Isabel, after a short conference with the other magistrates; "and, as you will, I hope, soon find him—while in case of his not living to manhood, you are the next heir—my colleagues and I think that you are the proper person to take charge of this casket."

"Pardon me," said Maurice, who with white face and agitated demeanour, had held aloof from the recent debate, "but as *I* have a reversionary interest in this valuable possession, or heirloom—indeed my chances being great—since the boy is lost, and the girl poor, and unprotected—pardon

me, therefore, if I say that she is not the proper custodian of the casket."

He had worked himself into a passion, and now stood scowling defiance on all around.

"Major St. Clair's daughter is neither poor nor unprotected," said a manly voice; and an officer in naval uniform stepped up to the front of the low platform. "Allow me, gentlemen," he continued, "to introduce myself as George St. Clair, captain in the royal navy, uncle to this young girl, and consequently her natural guardian and protector."

"What imposture is this!" cried Maurice St. Clair, "That person I know to be dead—drowned years ago!"

"Maurice," said Captain St. Clair sternly; "you cannot surely have forgotten me, much as I am altered! But if you do not recognise my person, you must remember a certain night in a Brazilian seaport, when returning unarmed from a late revel, a party of lawless marines set upon you, stabbed and rifled you, and but for a fellow countryman coming to the rescue, your hours

had been numbered? You must remember the base return you made for this seasonable help—the letter and its false answer, by Captain Winstanley, of the Columbus?”

“Enough, enough!” cried the traitor. “Is this a time or place for private discussions?”

“Certainly not,” said George St. Clair, with forced calmness. “But for this most unexpected affair of this casket, I had not now made myself known. We may meet and settle our accounts, at some future period.”

“Brother magistrates,” said Maurice, “I must leave you now, I have an engagement—and I am not well.” He made a sign to Lady Sophia, who had been listening, mystified; her anxious look deepened; and they hastened out of court.

Meanwhile the chairman placed the casket in Isabel’s hands, with a few complimentary words on the clear and concise way in which she had given her evidence; then leaving the platform, was joined by his family, who greeted Isabel cordially, and begged to be introduced to her uncle. Lady Beverley, as also her son Hugh, and

Flora, a lovely, modest looking girl of seventeen—the almost Puritan severity of whose costume did not conceal her natural grace—made many professions of friendship to the St. Clairs, inviting them to visit the Manor. This they agreed to do, at some future time; and then, on being informed by Farmer Stockwell that the coach was waiting, they were glad to leave the close, crowded Court, and after this long exciting day to find themselves once more on their way back to their temporary home at Wyke Farm.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FOUND AT LAST!

PROUD and happy was our young heroine, as she bore away with her the treasured casket; loud and hearty were the congratulations of the farmer and his family. These humble friends were indulged with a sight of the precious "Deed of Gift," written—like others of both earlier and later date—on a single half-sheet of small letter paper, in His Majesty's bold, but somewhat irregular handwriting, not free from a blot or two.

"I almost wished," said the farmer, "that Miss had pulled it out, and shown it in open Court. But, perhaps, it was best not."

"I think so," said Captain St. Clair. "You see, for one reason, it is useless without my young nephew, in whose favour it was written."

"Ah, true," and every face became grave and sad. Poor little Arthur; where was he? Did he still live? He was well and healthy six months ago. Had Maurice the usurper caused him to be kidnapped? It was not likely. If Maurice had the boy in his power, he would hardly have been so agitated at the sight of the casket.

"Oh, uncle, if we can but find him and my mother!" Isabel said sadly.

An early day was fixed for their journey to London, and, after taking a kind farewell of the Stockwells, Captain St. Clair and Isabel set off.

More than a century later the custom of praying publicly, in church, for one about to proceed to the metropolis, still prevailed; so it will be easily understood how anxiously the family at Wyke Farm longed for the promised letter to announce the travellers' safe arrival at their destination.

Safe, but weary, uncle and niece were glad to reach a comfortable hostel in a street leading out of the Strand, then considered a very fashionable

and agreeable locality. Many necessary purchases had to be made, passports to be obtained, and matters of business to be settled with Messrs. Stranghan, the agents, so that a stay in London of some weeks was contemplated. Besides, it would be extremely unwise, as Captain St. Clair reminded Isabel, to rush off to the Continent without allowing a reasonable time to learn the results of the enquiries and advertisements. The weather, too, would be more favourable for crossing the Channel, somewhat later in the season; meanwhile her uncle kindly took Isabel to see any objects of interest or amusement in the city and its environs, that were new to her; so that the time passed as pleasantly and profitably as the one unceasing anxiety about their missing relatives would allow.

It was the end of the third week after their first coming to London, that the Captain and Isabel sat by a window of their sitting room which overlooked the Thames, watching the pleasure boats and other craft plying to and fro, and enjoying the sunny afternoon, while they discussed their plans.

"I fear," St. Clair said, "that we may now feel pretty certain that those we seek have left British soil. Not an atom of information has been gained from our various sources of investigation. What say you, Isabel, shall I take our passage in the "Diana" bound from London to Dieppe, on Tuesday next?"

"Yes, dear uncle," replied Isabel, "I shall be quite ready."

"Have you got all you want, my dear?"

"All, except a little book for my diary—to note down the towns we stop at."

"Would you like to come with me and get it? I want to go to a shop near."

Isabel, always glad to walk with her uncle, ran to get her hat and cloak. The purchases were made, and the pair were walking towards their hotel, when Isabel felt something pulling her dress. Looking quickly round, she saw, to her surprise and joy, her little dog Fairy! She uttered an exclamation of pleasure, and stooped to caress her long-lost favourite, while Fairy greeted her with rapture.

“ Oh, uncle, it is Fairy—I see you remember him ?”

The dog also recognised Captain St. Clair, which, as Isabel said, showed his shrewdness—knowing a man when he was better off! Then Lawless did not kill him. But to whom did the faithful creature belong? Would they let Isabel have him back? Perhaps, if money were given. Fairy was in good condition, and wore a fine silver collar. Some gentleman or lady must own him. Isabel was for going back a little way. But this did not suit Fairy; he ran on to the end of a small street near, then back to Isabel, then a little way down the street.

“ Let us follow him,” said Isabel; so they went down Essex Street, the dog running forward, and back again, in wild excitement and delight; jumping up at Isabel, who, in playing with him, dropped a parcel which she and Fairy went back to recover. Captain St. Clair, who was a little in advance, paused at a bookseller’s shop, by the door of which stood a little boy dressed in deep mourning, crying as if his heart would break.

"What is the matter, my dear?" asked the Captain, who was fond of children. The boy sobbed out that he had lost his little dog. It had suddenly run away from him.

"Then I think I can help you," was the rejoinder, when, Isabel coming up, no sooner caught sight of the little fellow's face, than, with a scream, she caught him in her arms, and embraced him tenderly.

"Arthur, Arthur! I have found you at last!" she exclaimed.

"Isabel—my own darling sister! Then you are not dead?" said the child, looking in her face and clinging to her.

"Oh, uncle, this is Arthur!" said Isabel. Then added—"My mother; where is she; take me to her."

"She is in there," said Arthur, pointing to the shop.

He took her hand and led her in, the Captain following. By the counter was a slight, tall lady, robed in black, who, Isabel's heart told her, even before she saw the averted face, was her

mother. The girl could not speak for a moment, but as she approached, Mrs. St. Clair turned round—saw the daughter she had so long believed dead—uttered a cry, and overcome by sudden joy would have fallen to the ground but that the Captain supported her with his arm.

“Mother, dearest mother; do you not know me?” cried Isabel.

“My beloved child,” faltered the mother, reviving, and folding her daughter to her breast.

The bookseller, a kind, considerate man, who well knew the St. Clair family, now led the way to a parlour at the back of his shop, and invited the little party in. Isabel did not long forget her uncle.

“Mother,” she said, “look at him. Do you not know him? Do you not remember—”

Mrs. St. Clair gazed earnestly at the stranger.

“Tell me, Isabel,” she said. “Who—who—I know his face, yet—”

“Mother, it is my uncle; our dear father’s brother George,” Isabel replied.

Notwithstanding the long separation, they now

perfectly remembered each other ; and the newly-found relatives embraced, with murmured words of joy and affection.

“ And this is my little nephew,” said George St. Clair, laying his hand on Arthur’s head. “ How much we shall have to tell each other ! How long have you been in London ? and where are you staying ? ”

Mrs. St. Clair, with her son and Mrs. Pym, had only come to London the previous evening. They were in small lodgings not far distant, with a friend of their old servant’s. They could not afford an expensive abode.

“ Then come to my hostelry,” said Captain St. Clair, eagerly. “ There is plenty of room for you. We will send for Mrs. Pym and your luggage.”

“ Let us go and bring her,” cried Isabel, impatient to see her nurse.

This was readily assented to ; Mrs. St. Clair and Arthur going in first, that the old woman’s nerves might not receive too sudden a shock. Even with this precaution, it seemed at first as if

Mrs. Pym would lose her senses, or fall into a fit, so great was her astonishment to find Isabel alive. Her delight, when Captain St. Clair presented himself, was greater than her surprise at seeing him. She had always predicted that he would return and be a blessing to them all—the dear, noble-hearted sailor boy that he used to be, with his bright face and his merry laugh.

In a couple of hours' time the new comers were settled at the hostel in Cecil Street, and explanations on both sides had been given and received. Isabel learned that her mother, after leaving Rock Cottage, was on her way to London, preparatory to quitting England for the Continent, when, owing to a break down of their carriage, she and her little party were detained a few days at a small village in one of the Midland counties. The poor lady, whose health had been affected by grief and much exertion, was unwell before starting, but had hoped at least to reach London before she stopped to rest. But during this short delay her painful symptoms rapidly increased, and she was soon prostrated by severe inflammation of

the chest, followed by an attack of fever—of a kind just then prevalent in the locality. She was kindly treated at the small wayside inn, where she was obliged to stay; but the weakness remaining, after the worst of her illness had subsided, was very great, and the depression of spirits from which she suffered, rendered her recovery exceedingly slow. Then Arthur had sickened with the fever, and this still further delayed their progress. After a time the little party moved on to a more healthy district; and happening to meet with a pleasant cottage, and kind, simple people, Mrs. St. Clair had resolved to stay over Christmas in this quiet spot, and delay her departure from England until the spring made travelling more agreeable.

“My dear boy was as happy as he could be without his sister,” continued the gentle lady; “he seemed amused with the various pet animals kept at our cottage home. I had feared that he would go into a decline, so weak and ill did the fever leave him; his state was for a long while the cause of the greatest anxiety to me. I feared I

should lose him too ! We got new milk and eggs and other country luxuries for him at Daintree. Mrs. Pym liked the place ; she met with a cousin there. It mattered little to me where I was. I staid on, in this secluded spot, where the mild yet bracing air suited my dear little invalid. We did not quit it, until about three weeks ago, when by very easy stages we made our way on to London. Little did I dream what happiness awaited us there."

Isabel asked how, and where, they had found Fairy ? She was told that about two months after her supposed death, the sorrowful little party were stopping at the first stage of their journey from Rock Cottage to London ; when Arthur, with a cry of joy, recognised the little dog, in the arms of a man who was offering it for sale in the market place.

"A man with a cunning face, small sharp eyes and red hair," Arthur said, "who wore a slouched hat and large cloak."

"That was Lawless, commonly called 'Foxy ;'" exclaimed Isabel.

"He seemed very cruel," added Arthur, "for he beat Fairy when the poor little thing struggled and whined to come to me."

"He asked an exorbitant price for the dog," said Mrs. St. Clair; "but as you may imagine, dear Isabel, we gladly gave it, to recover the faithful little creature so endeared by association with you. We tried to trace out where it had come from, but in vain. All we could get from the man was that he had picked it up on a neighbouring common, wandering about alone, and half-starved."

Supper was over. Mrs. Pym on this occasion making one of the party, that she might hear many interesting matters concerning the family she had served so long and faithfully.

And all the important events had been told, except one. That was the recovery of the casket. Isabel had begged her uncle to be silent on the subject—she had planned a little surprise; and quitting the sitting-room directly after the cloth was drawn, she presently reappeared in her costume of a yeoman's daughter, with plaid grace-

fully arranged, and carrying on her arm a market basket. Her uncle, who was in the secret, pretended to want farm produce, playfully complaining of the young market woman's high prices. At last, after some joking and laughing, she said she had, at the bottom of her basket, an article quite of another kind, which would exactly suit the young gentleman. What would he give her for it? Arthur, entering eagerly into the spirit of the game, produced a bright new silver penny.

"That will do—you shall have it for that," said Isabel; and removing some fresh vine leaves from her basket, she drew forth—and placed in her brother's hands—The Casket !

CHAPTER XXV.

THE KING'S DECISION.

It seemed to Isabel when she awoke next morning, as if all this happiness must be a dream, —like those from which in her wanderings she would rouse, all the more unhappy to find the bright forms and sweet voices unreal !

But no ; those were her mother's loving eyes looking down upon her, and that was Arthur's bright face peeping in at the door, begging leave to come in and give her just one kiss, before she rose.

“ I have seen uncle already,” said the little boy, “ I love him, he is so kind. Shall we not leave off our mourning, mother, now that Isabel and uncle are both found ?”

This practical suggestion was quickly carried

out. It was not so easy to decide where the happy family party should next go ; or what steps should be taken with respect to the recovered Deed of Gift.

Captain St. Clair, who in his youth had, as well as the other members of his family, been presented at court, asked for an audience with King Charles, at Whitehall, through one of his ministers. This was graciously granted, and his majesty was also pleased to request that Mrs. St. Clair with her two children should accompany their relative.

On the appointed day they drove to the palace, where they found the King lounging on a sofa, with four or five dogs about him. He received the little party with that mixture of dignity and graceful ease for which he was distinguished ; shook hands cordially with Captain St. Clair, alluding to his gallant service, and strange adventures ; spoke with respectful sympathy to the widow, of her late husband, who fell in that terrible affray at Worcester. " And this is his son," pursued the King, after a brief pause. " If you will

let me have him as my page, I will take special care of him. His sister, I hear, is quite a heroine—met with as many hair-breadth escapes as we ourselves did in our exile ?”

“I met with some strange adventures, sire,” said Isabel, thus appealed to ; “but my getting into the robbers’ hiding-place was the means of finding my uncle, and afterwards this casket belonging to my brother.”

“Indeed ! how did you get amongst the robbers ?”

Isabel gave a short sketch of her adventures, assisted by pithy and appropriate questions from the King. As she concluded, his majesty asked to see the casket, which Arthur, instructed before hand, presented kneeling. The deed was produced, amongst the other contents, all of which Charles examined with interest. He recognised, and at once acknowledged his own hand-writing.

“How stupid to have ever forgotten it !” he exclaimed ; and how unfortunate its being so long lost ! The present possessor of the estates

has, I believe, no children — and has been married many years ?”

“ Nearly twenty, sire,” was St. Clair’s reply.

“ Well,” said Charles, thoughtfully, this matter requires, and shall receive, our most serious consideration. Meantime, fair Isabel,” he added, in a lighter tone, “ allow me to present you with this small token of my admiration and respect.” He took from his finger a small emerald ring, and placed it on hers. The young girl, blushing, made a low curtsy, and expressed her sense of the honour, in terms which, if not perfectly conventional, came from her heart. The King seemed pleased ; he made a sign to one of the lords in waiting ; wines and sweetmeats were brought in, and partaken of ; a few courteous phrases interchanged, and the interview was at an end.

Not long after, came a letter from the King’s private secretary, to the effect that as a subsequent writ under his majesty’s own hand and seal had put Maurice St. Clair in possession of the estates, he thought the fairest arrangement would be to allow that gentleman to continue to hold St.

Clair Hall, and the lands thereto appertaining, for his life, and to make young Arthur his heir in tail. By letters patent, his majesty empowered a female descendant to succeed to the property. He further decreed that Maurice should pay the sum of six hundred pounds yearly out of the estates, to Major St. Clair's widow—instead of the very inadequate pension he had allowed her—with two hundred pounds each, annually, to her children; and a further payment of five thousand pounds to each, on their marriage, or on their respectively attaining the age of twenty one. This arrangement, the King thought, was the fairest he could make, and would, he hoped, be satisfactory to all parties concerned.

George St. Clair, after due reflection, resolved to abstain from seeking out his kinsman Maurice. "The past cannot be recalled," he wisely reflected, "to reproach him with his treachery would serve no good purpose. He knows that I still live; and I am happy, and undeceived, at last. God has been very merciful to me, and brought me through great trials; I have no wish to be vindictive."

Isabel was disappointed at the result of her visit to Whitehall, so also was Arthur.

"I thought," said the little boy, "that as the King gave Isabel such a beautiful ring, and me that large packet of French bonbons, and was so kind to us all, he would surely let us go back at once to St. Clair Hall?"

"My finding the deed is of but little use," said Isabel, gravely.

"It has placed our family in a far more secure position," said their uncle. "Arthur's succession is secured, and you are both, as well as your mother, handsomely provided for. Charles might have found it very difficult and inconvenient to revoke his appointment of Maurice—that bold, haughty, reckless man."

"Oh, yes! dear uncle, I see you are right," said Isabel; and Arthur agreed with his sister, as he almost always did.

Maurice, on his side, was angry and indignant at the king's decision; but his Majesty reminded him that as the deed conveying the property to another—and doubtless the *true* branch of the

family—was found, he (Maurice) might be very thankful that he still retained a life-interest in the estate; which gave him the means of providing suitably for the Lady Sophia—in case she survived him. As the couple were childless, why should they desire more?

Mrs. St. Clair and her children were now comparatively rich; they were thankful and content; where they should reside was the next question. Isabel said—"We were all thinking of going to the Continent, why should we not travel a little, before settling down in England?" This notion was hailed as a happy one by the rest of the family. Poor Mrs. Pym made a wry face; but instantly said she did not wish to go back from her word—she had promised to go with her mistress and Master Arthur.

All appreciated the good woman's devotion, but the case was altered now, by the presence of the Captain, and Isabel. It was a pity to subject the faithful creature to all the discomforts of foreign travel, which those who were younger could endure, and even derive amusement from. No,

she should remain at Daintree with her cousin, and take care of Fairy—the little dog, of course, could not be taken to foreign lands. Mrs. Pym was persuaded;—the family would only be absent a few months; then they would call for her, on their way to the North, where they hoped ultimately to make a home.

Space does not admit of any detailed account of this foreign tour, which was much enjoyed by all the party. Captain St. Clair, who had travelled a good deal, was a capital guide, and, under his auspices, his three relatives saw all that was best worth seeing in Germany, France, and Italy. In those days, when it was a distinction to travel on the Continent, and when plenty of money and a considerable amount of courage were requisite, all felt that they had accomplished a rather grand undertaking; more than that, they had gained much experience, and acquired knowledge that would be always valuable.

But a summer spent in foreign travel was enough, and by the end of August they were

ready to return to England, convinced, as have been so many, both before and since, that there is no place equal to it. Having crossed the Channel safely, the travellers went Northward by easy stages, and, taking Mrs. Pym with them, as well as the faithful little Fairy, proceeded to Greystock, and put up for the time at the principal inn of that town. It should be mentioned that as the St. Clairs passed through London on their return from the Continent, Arthur had been taken to the family physician, who gave it as his opinion that the little boy had now so far outgrown his delicacy that there was no further cause for anxiety on his account.

One letter had been sent to the care of Mr. Harris, the chief shopkeeper; it was from Miss Walters, the lady who had bought Rock Cottage. She complained that she found the place lonely, and would be glad to part with it again. She had added several additional rooms, a conservatory and outbuildings, so that the house was now suited for a family of considerable size. Hearing Mrs. St. Clair was coming to Grey-

stock, she ventured to offer it to her again, on fair terms.

"Oh mother, let us go back to dear Rock Cottage again!" cried Isabel and Arthur.

"I am willing," was the answer. "What does Uncle George say?"

The Captain liked the idea, provided the house was large enough. "I wish," he added, "to be near the sea. I have set my heart on building a yacht; then I shall be able to leave you whenever you are tired of my company."

"Oh uncle, you will not surely go off to sea again, and leave us," said the two children, with blank looks.

Their uncle assured them that he should only take short cruises. "And you shall go with me, if you like."

That would be delightful. Rock Cottage was visited, and found to be sufficiently large, and greatly improved. It would be interesting and profitable to make still further additions; so as to render the place quite perfect in its way, as a residence. Terms were soon arranged, two or

three more servants engaged, comprising Molly Jenkyns, who was overjoyed to return to the family she had quitted with such regret; and at Michaelmas the little family so happily re-united, their dear uncle now added to their number, took possession of Rock Cottage once more.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A LAST VISIT TO THE CASTLE.

Two happy, but comparatively uneventful years passed. A time of regular study, and mental improvement, to Isabel and her brother; of useful occupation and calm enjoyment to all. Not always do relatives, long parted by circumstances, however dear to each other, find thorough pleasure, and mutual sympathy, when brought together. But in the case of this little family, all was congenial. George St. Clair, through all his wanderings, had longed for the quiet and peace of domestic life. Since boyhood he had scarcely known what it was to have a home; now that he had found one, he fully appreciated the blessing. He himself was a most delightful companion; earnest, intellectual, gentle, and affectionate; yet

full of spirit and energy ; having seen much and thought much. Past suffering had only served to strengthen and ennoble his character, and to make him more grateful for the happiness that had at last fallen to his lot.

Isabel and Arthur idolized him ; and he entered with the deepest interest into all that concerned them ; joining with their mother in encouraging them in their studies, and in training them to grow up good and unselfish ; while he was the first to promote, or invent schemes for their diversion and amusement. Expeditions to re-visit persons and places, interesting from past association, were amongst the chief of their innocent pleasures.

Although the family now possessed a coach ; the little cart drawn by Donald and another pony , and driven by Arthur (the Captain following on horseback), was the favourite mode of conveyance, except on state occasions.

Wyke Farm was one of the first places visited ; indeed a friendly intercourse was always maintained with the good farmer, who had behaved so

well in time of need, and who was invariably eager to hear all that concerned the St. Clair family, with whose fortunes he had been so singularly mixed up.

Witches' Glen was the object of another expedition. Betty Blake was surprised and glad to see Isabel again ; she thought it so kind of the young lady to remember her, and bring her relatives to this lonely abode. She was especially delighted with Arthur, who was, she said, the very image of her dear, lost boy, Jamie ! Isabel's adventures interested the Dame exceedingly, especially her escape from the cave, and the capture of the robbers. Mrs St. Clair had brought the old woman some suitable and useful gifts—a whole copy of the bible, in good plain type, which was indeed a valuable present ; a warm cloak, some groceries, and a bottle of cordial, or strong waters, in case of illness ; while Arthur gave her a pair of handsome Spanish fowls ; and the Captain, a copy of George Herbert's poems, with the life of that pious and humble-minded divine. The animals recollected Isabel, or she

fancied they did, but the sight of so many strangers frightened them! Fairy and the cat Grip renewed their former half hostile, half friendly relations. With her mother's permission, Isabel promised to repeat the visit, at least once in a year.

"You are too kind ; you spoil me," said old Betty, with tears of gratitude. "It is not so much the nice things, valuable as they are, and useful—especially this blessed book—but it is the tender thought and feeling shown by it all!"

Daniel Benson, and the kind, simple people at the fishing village, were not forgotten ; indeed, a fine young sailor, a son of old Daniel's, just home from a long voyage, so took Captain St. Clair's fancy, that he was, after due trial, engaged as one of the crew of the yacht "Isabel;"—the building, and then the christening and launching of which, formed one great source of interest, during the first year.

A whole day was devoted to visiting the White Cottage. The exciseman, his wife, and Betty, had felt very anxious at not hearing of Isabel for

so long; John Benson had been over more than once to Greystock, and also to Rock Cottage, to make enquiries. Betty being as desirous as ever to be Isabel's attendant, was duly engaged in that capacity by Mrs. St. Clair, and never did Isabel or her mother have cause to regret taking the devoted country lass into the family.

With some difficulty the shepherd's hut was found—the hut that had proved such a welcome refuge to Isabel; it was viewed with much interest. The faithful Toby recollected her: and almost knocked her down with his rough gambols, and demonstrations of joy. Isabel had not forgotten the toy-horse for little Charles, while her mother had brought a bundle of left off clothes for the shepherd's wife and children; and the Captain presented the good man himself, with a crown piece.

The neighbouring gentry made state calls at Rock Cottage, and amongst these were the Beverley family. An invitation to pass a few days at the Manor, was given and accepted; and gradually a warm friendship and intimacy was established

between the two families; who found they had many pursuits and tastes in common. A strong sympathy seemed from the very first to draw Captain St. Clair and Flora Beverley together. Flora had been duly presented at court, and had mixed in the best London and country society for three years; she was greatly admired for her beauty and intelligence. There was a quiet reserve in her manners in general society, that contrasted strongly with the flippant, noisy gaiety affected by many young ladies of the period, a style becoming very fashionable at court. Yet she could be lively enough with intimate friends; and it was observed that of these, her favourites were the St. Clairs. Several distinguished gentlemen, one of them a noble, had asked her hand in marriage, but all had been refused. It was thought that the reason for this coldness to her suitors was a preference for Captain St. Clair; at any rate she never seemed so happy as in his society, notwithstanding the difference of some fifteen years in their respective ages. The Cap-

tain, when questioned by his nephew and niece on the subject, owned that he thought Flora the most interesting girl he had ever met, as good and sensible as she was beautiful. "If I were young, and in a sufficiently high position," he added, "I should certainly choose her for my wife, of all others—if she would have me!" But though George St. Clair undervalued himself, no one else in either family thought him unsuitable. Flora might, of course, make a grander match, but she did not seem disposed to do so. She had a handsome independent fortune, left by an aunt, and could please herself. The Beverleys were not mercenary, or worldly. Therefore there seemed great reason to hope that, in time, a connexion so desirable might take place.

Hugh, now a thoughtful looking, manly, Oxford student, was as devoted a friend of Isabel and Arthur as he had been during their early, brief acquaintance. He was very fond of the sea, and both he and his sister often joined the yachting parties.

It was near the close of the second year of the

St. Clairs' residence at Rock Cottage, before a visit to the old castle was determined on, although a cruise in the yacht, with that object in view, had been often spoken of; and the picturesque ruin had been seen and admired from the sea, when sailing past. These short voyages were much enjoyed by all; the little vessel was a perfect model, so trim and graceful; the crew all picked men, with Ned Benson as master—a fine, active fellow, with a long brown beard.

Isabel and her uncle felt a strong curiosity to see once more the place where they had suffered so severely, now that sufficient time had elapsed to soften the (at first) too painfully vivid recollections. Mrs. St. Clair and Arthur were also very desirous of visiting this strange and wonderful place, while Flora and Hugh were not less interested in the subject.

Accordingly, on the second anniversary of Michaelmas Day—on which Rock Cottage was taken possession of—the united party set out on their voyage. All were in high spirits, the day was delightful, with just wind enough to fill

the white sails of the "Isabel," without causing any unpleasant swell on the water.

As they sat on deck, the conversation turned on Maurice St. Clair.

"I regret to hear from many quarters," said Hugh Beverley, "that he gives more and more dissatisfaction to all who are connected with him. The tenants and labourers on the estate find him a hard landlord, and harsh master, and I fear he is a tyrannical, unkind husband."

"Aye, sir," said Benson, respectfully, joining in, as he stood for a moment near; "he is the most unpopular man in all the county round. No one, gentle or simple, gives him a good word. They say the king never did a worse job than putting Master Maurice into that place. He grinds down the poor tenants, raises their rent, and turns them out if they are a bit behindhand. The Christmas gifts and other charities which the poor have looked to, from that house—aye, and had too—for generations, are all stopped. No logs cut down, no ale, no beef nor bread. He is poor, and can't afford it, he says."

"Is that because he has to pay us, I wonder," said Isabel, thoughtfully.

"Oh no, miss," said Benson. "He was just as bad the first year he came. Lady Sophia brought him a goodish bit of money, but he has got hold of it, and won't let her spend a penny. My sister lives with her, and says her poor lady has a sad time of it. I would not speak, but it's no secret. He has such dreadful gloomy fits, he will not speak to his wife sometimes for a week together. He does not get much enjoyment, I take it, out of the property he planned so hard, and behaved so dishonourably, to possess."

"A man cannot be happy with such a heavy load on his conscience," observed George St. Clair gravely.

"Indeed no," said Hugh. "Talk about being poor! What is the one thousand a year he is charged with, out of his princely revenues?"

"They say his great interest is in rearing horses," threw in Benson.

"He certainly rides some very wild ones," observed Flora. "We saw him yesterday, racing along at furious speed."

"I've heard more than one person say they should not grieve if he broke his neck," said the master. "I must say—"

"Hush, Benson," said Captain St. Clair, gently. "You must not dwell on such thoughts. We are getting near the castle."

"Aye, sir, one more tack will take us into the little bay."

All landed, and accompanied by Benson and two more stout sailors, bearing torches—for the ladies and children were somewhat nervous—went to the ruins. All admired the beautiful gateway, and the grand old arches, and buttresses, still left standing, and the party lingered outside, until reassured by the escort; when holding her uncle's hand, while Arthur tightly grasped hers, Isabel gained courage to descend. She was glad to see that the trap door had been wrenched off its hinges and flung on one side, while the first iron door was also removed from its position, and the inner one the same. Evident traces of the barricade, and of the conflict with the smugglers, were visible; broken fire arms, torn fragments of

clothing, splintered casks, the rough furniture overturned. It was a dismal scene. Whilst the Captain and Isabel were explaining various matters to the rest, on a sudden a loud shriek was heard, followed by another and another. Isabel turned pale, the ladies gathered close together, Arthur begun to cry and cling round his sister; even the Captain started, and the sailors looked astonished.

“Dame Crab!” almost instantly exclaimed Isabel.

Indeed such fearful and hideous noises could proceed from no one save that old hag! One of the sailors, in obedience to St. Clair’s orders, was proceeding down the further passage, to find and bring forward the old woman, when hasty steps were heard, and Dame Crab, herself, ran into the cave, and stood in the midst of the assembled party! She was more wild, and haggard, and evil-looking, than ever; and Isabel felt faint, and all but overcome with images of the terrible past, recalled by the sight of that weird figure. The dame was now silent,

but she turned a scrutinizing gaze first on one person then on another, as all stood still for a moment. She ignored the male members of the party, but examined the ladies keenly, first Mrs. St. Clair, then Flora, turning away with a shake of the head. At last she spied Isabel, and yelling out—

“ Ah, you are come at last, are you—you who have been my worst enemy—lost me my mates; my comforts, my *son*—you did not know the captain was my son, but he was!—got him hanged, and made my home a desert, a place only fit for wild beasts; but I’ve waited for ye, and I’ll have my revenge. I know ye, through all your finery, you vile, treacherous, wicked—”

At this point, doubling herself together for a spring, she flew like a wild cat at Isabel, as though wishing to tear her to pieces; but fortunately the girl was well protected, her uncle had his arm round her, Hugh was close at hand, and Benson, quick as lightning, caught the old woman as she sprung forward, and held her fast.

No one desired to stay another moment in this cave after this occurrence. Glad enough were all the party to regain the fresh air and daylight ; though poor Isabel's nerves had been so shaken, and she had been so much alarmed by this unexpected apparition, that it was not until after many minutes that she recovered her composure. Dame Crab was no longer capable of doing harm to any one ; she had, after her brief paroxysm, sunk down helpless, and seemed in a state of semi-imbecility, which, as a fisherman who was loitering near informed the Captain, was her ordinary state. How she lived no one exactly knew, but after being dismissed by the magistrates, when the robbers were committed for trial, she had, it was supposed, crept back to the old hiding place, and made it her head-quarters. Wicked old wretch as Dame Crab was, it was not consistent with humanity to leave her in this helpless state, to perish. The fisherman, who was known to Benson, offered to take her to the village, and for a trifling pension to provide for her wants.

“ My wife will see to her,” said the man, “ but

by the looks on her, I do not believe the old creature will trouble anybody long."

Which prediction, it may be mentioned, proved true, for Dame Crab only lived a few weeks longer, during which time, Miss Beverley visited her often, and also a clergyman, who tried to produce some religious impressions; but the old woman either was, or appeared to be, insensible to what was said, and his kind efforts were unavailing.

This was not the only startling event destined to mark this day to our voyagers. Just as they had concluded their evening meal, which it was voted unanimously should be taken at a considerable distance from the castle, a sailor came running down the slope from the cliff to the beach where they sat, followed by a servant, whose boots and spurs, and disordered air, spoke of a hurried journey on horseback. This man announced himself as a messenger from St. Clair Hall, who, on reaching Rock Cottage, had taken a fresh horse and ridden across country, as his business was urgent, to Captain St. Clair.

“What is amiss?” asked that gentleman, as the servant’s manner betokened ill tidings.

“My master, sir”—was the answer. “He had a bad fall from his horse, his head was struck with great violence, so as to fracture the skull. He rallied and spoke a few words.

“‘My kinsman, George,’ he said, ‘I did him grievous wrong, he has behaved nobly in not seeking revenge. I would speak with him, and ask his pardon ere I die?’ Lady Sophia would not stay to write, she bade me ride post haste to you, to beg you, as a Christian gentleman, to come at once.”

“I will,” said George St. Clair. “Tell me, is he then in great danger?”

“Alas, sir, when I had got one stage on my way, and did but stop to breathe my steed, and moisten my lips at the inn, a groom overtook me, with the news that it was too late. My master was dead!”

Dead! cut off thus suddenly, with scarcely a moment for thought or prayer! He had at least avowed his repentance of one wrong deed. That was consoling to think of. All were greatly shocked at the intelligence.

No need to obey that deathbed summons now. It was too late. A message of respectful condolence to Lady Sôphia, to be followed in due time by the assurance that her comfort and wishes should be studied, was all that was now possible.

It was not until the little party were sailing homeward, their vessel gliding gently, under the flood of silvery moonlight, that any one spoke of the consequences to themselves, of the usurper's sudden death. To return to St. Clair Hall! To be once more, and so soon, in possession of the dear old home! It was, indeed, happiness!

"Let us hope," said Isabel, "that we may be as happy there as we have been at Rock Cottage."

"As happy"—rejoined her uncle, "and my dear children, may you also, with God's blessing, continue as unselfish and as unworldly as you now are; as unspoiled by prosperity, as you were brave in adversity; bearing in mind that in proportion to the gifts, the talents bestowed upon you, is the responsibility for their use and that much is required of those to whom much is given."

There was a silence, and after a time, Isabel pointing to a little sketch her uncle had that day

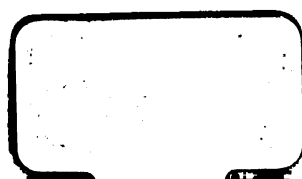
given her of the Castle, whose gloomy ruins were now brightened by the golden rays of the slowly setting sun—said softly and humbly—

“If ever I feel tempted to fall into my besetting faults of carelessness and wilfulness, I think the sight of that picture, which I shall frame and hang in my own room, will check me, by causing me to remember all the sufferings these faults drew upon me and those I love, more especially in the time that I spent in that dreadful place.”

“If you ever forget your good resolutions,” said her uncle, tenderly and playfully, “I shall only have to put you on board the yacht and bring you back to take a near view of its ruins.”

“Indeed, I trust that will never be necessary dear uncle,” said Isabel, “for though I am glad to have seen it once more, and to have renewed my former impressions, yet I cannot say I ever wish to enter the gloomy dungeon again. No, I hope this is my last visit to the castle!”

THE END.



the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are obese has increased by 100% (World Health Organization 1997).

Obesity is a complex condition, with many causes and consequences. It is a condition that is associated with a number of health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure. It is also a condition that is associated with a number of social problems, including discrimination and stigma. Obesity is a condition that is becoming increasingly common in many parts of the world, and it is a condition that is becoming increasingly difficult to treat. This paper will discuss the causes and consequences of obesity, and it will discuss some of the ways in which obesity can be treated.

Obesity is a condition that is defined as being significantly overweight. It is a condition that is caused by a number of factors, including genetics, diet, and lack of exercise. Obesity is a condition that is associated with a number of health problems, including heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure. It is also a condition that is associated with a number of social problems, including discrimination and stigma. Obesity is a condition that is becoming increasingly common in many parts of the world, and it is a condition that is becoming increasingly difficult to treat.

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